

PRABUDDHA BHARATA

or AWAKENED INDIA

A monthly journal of the Ramakrishna Order
started by Swami Vivekananda in 1896



July 2019

Vol. 124, No. 7

₹ 15.00

² THE ROAD TO WISDOM

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA ON *Supernatural Explained*

All over the world there has been the belief in the supernatural throughout the ages. All of us have heard of extraordinary happenings, and many of us have had some personal experience of them. I was in the city of Hyderabad in India, and I was told of a Brahmin there who could produce numbers of things from where, nobody knew. He had only a strip of cloth about his loins, we took off everything else from him. I had a blanket which I gave him to wrap round himself, because it was cold, and made him sit in a corner. Twenty-five pairs of eyes were looking at him. And he said, 'Now, look, write down anything you want.' We all wrote down names of fruits that never grew in that country, bunches of grapes, oranges, and so on. And we gave him those bits of paper. And there came from under his blanket, bushels of grapes, oranges, and so forth, so much that if all that fruit was weighed, it would have been twice as heavy as the man. He asked us to eat the fruit. Some of us objected, thinking it was hypnotism; but the man began eating himself—so we all ate. It was all right. He ended by producing a mass of roses. Each flower was perfect, with dew-drops on the petals, not one crushed, not one injured. And masses of them! When I asked the man for an explanation, he said, 'It is all sleight of hand.' From



whence could he have got such large quantities of things? [Though] there is a great deal of fraud, whenever you see fraud, you have also to say that fraud is an imitation. Thousands of years ago, these facts used to happen even more than frequently. Though extraordinary, there is nothing supernatural [about this]. They are under laws just as any other physical phenomenon. They can be systematically studied, practiced, and acquired. This science they call the science of Raja-Yoga. There are thousands of people who cultivate the study of this science, and for the whole nation it has become a part of daily worship. The conclusion they have reached is that all these extraordinary powers are in the mind of man. This mind is a part of man is a part of the universal mind. Each mind is connected with every other mind. And each mind, wherever it is located, is in actual communication with the whole world.

From *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*,
(Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 2016), 2.10-13.

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Contents

Traditional Wisdom	535
This Month	536
<i>Editorial: From Underperformance to Beyond Performance</i>	537
Acharya Shankara and the Idea of India: Peregrination as Pedagogy <i>Shonaleeka Kaul</i>	539
Science and Philosophy of Our Inner Transformation <i>Gopal Chandra Bhar</i>	543
The Simplicity and Non-duality of Brahman-God in Indian and Western Thought <i>Gopal Stavig</i>	553
Young Eyes: How Should be the Married Life of Parents? <i>Balabodha: Brahmana</i>	568 570
Traditional Tales: The Faith that Brought a Miracle	571
Reviews	573
Manana	577
Reports	579

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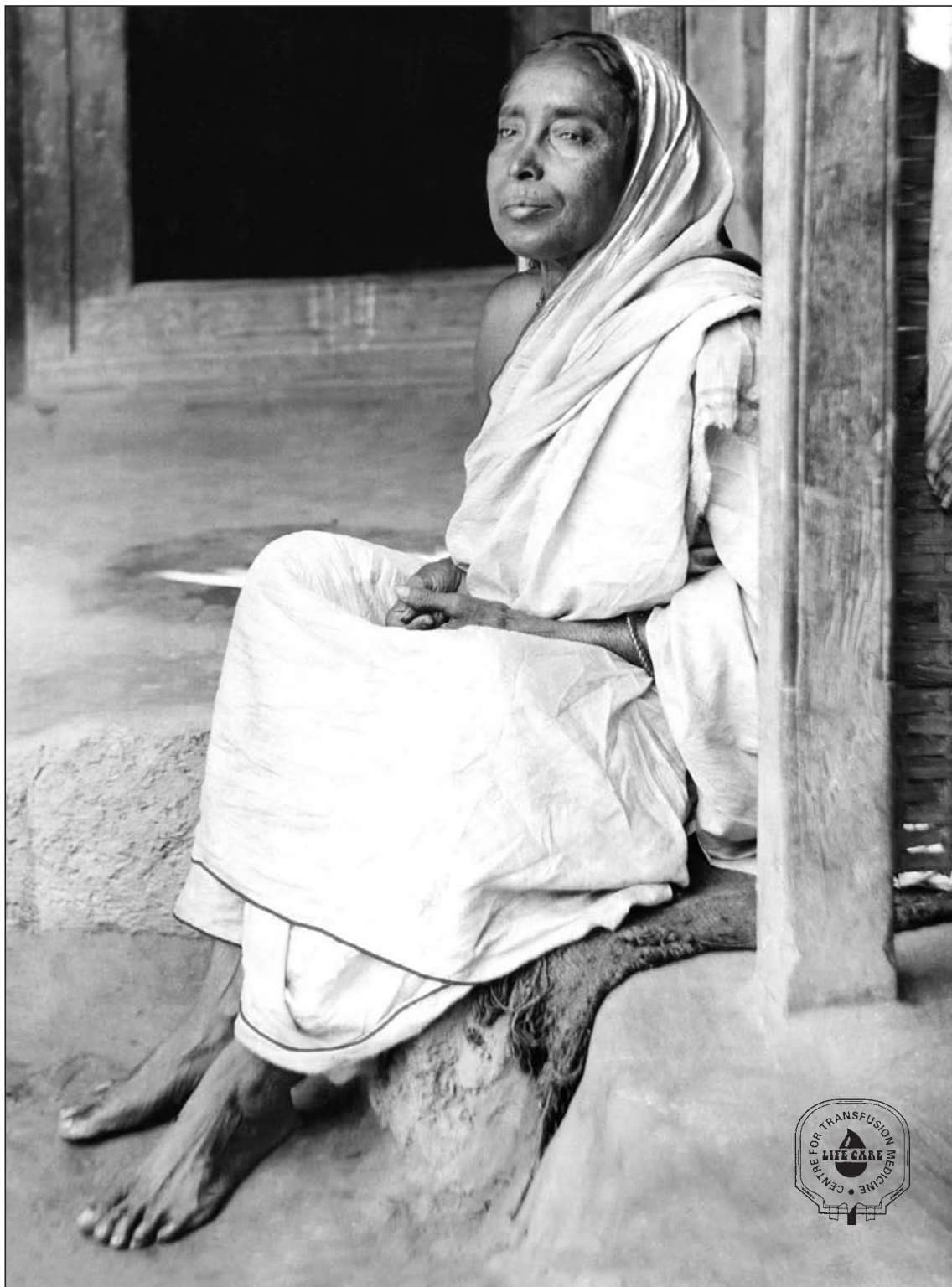
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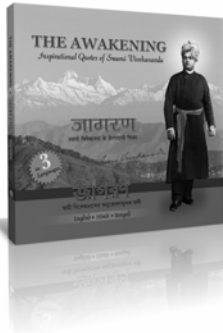


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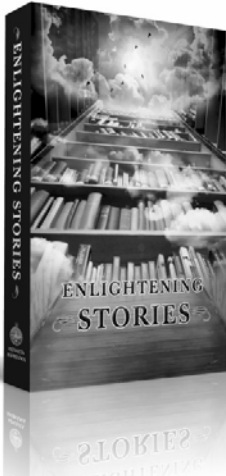
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Arise! Awake! And stop not till the goal is reached!

July 2019
Vol. 124, No. 7

Maitrayaniya Upanishad

मैत्रायणीयोपनिषत्

अथान्यत्राप्युक्तं वाप्सु चारिणः शाकुनिकः सूत्रयन्त्रेणोद्धृत्योदरेऽग्नौ जुहोत्येवं वाव खल्विमान् प्राणानोमित्यने-
नोद्धृत्यानामयेऽग्नौ जुहोत्यतस्तप्तोर्वीव सोऽथ यथा तप्तोर्वि सर्पिस्तृणकाष्ठसंस्पर्शेनोज्ज्वलतीत्येवं वाव
खल्वसावप्राणाख्यः प्राणसंस्पर्शेनोज्ज्वलत्यथ यदुज्ज्वलत्येतद्ब्रह्माणो रूपञ्चैतद्विष्णोः परमं पदञ्चैतद्ब्रह्मस्य
रुद्रत्वमेतत्तदपरिमितधा चात्मानं विभज्य पूरयतीमान् लोकानित्येवं ह्याह ।

वहेश्च यद्वत् खलु विस्फुलिङ्गाः ।

सूर्यान्मयूखाश्च तथैव तस्यः ॥

प्राणादयो वै पुनरेव तस्मा- ।

दभ्युच्चरन्तीह यथाक्रमेण ॥

॥ ६.२६ ॥

*Athany-atrapy-uktam yatha vapsu charinah shakunikah sutra-yantrenoddhrityodarē'gnau juhoty-
evam vava khalv-iman pranan omity-anenoddhrityanamayē'gnau juhoty-atas-taptorviva so'tha
yatha taptorvi sarpi-strina-kashtha-samsparshehojjvalatity-evam vava khalv-asav-apranakhyah
prana-samsparshehojjvalatyatha yadujjvalaty-etad-brahmano rupanchaitadvishnob paramam
padanchaitad-rudrasya rudratvam-etad-tad-aparimitadha chatmanam vibhajya purayatiman
lokan-ity-evam hy-aha.*

Vahnesh-cha yadvat khalu visphulingah, suryan mayukhash-cha tathaiva tasya.

Pranadayo vai punar eva tasmad, abhyuchcharantiha yatha kramena.

(6.26)

And thus it has been said elsewhere: 'Indeed, like a hunter catches water-creatures in a net and sacrifices them in the fire of one's stomach, one breathes through Om and sacrifices them in the illness-free fire, and hence it is like a heated vessel. Now, as ghee in a heated vessel lights up by contact with lighted grass or wood, thus indeed one who is called non-breath lights up by contact with the breaths. Now, that which lights up is a form of Brahman and is the highest place of Vishnu and that is the Rudra nature of Rudra. That having divided itself in limitless ways fills these worlds.' And thus it has been said: 'And as indeed, issue sparks from fire, rays from the sun, do the breaths and the rest come over and again into the world in proper order.'

(6.26)

THIS MONTH

WHAT IS THE SECRET of great performance of work? What is the goal of karma yoga? How to achieve it in our daily lives? All these questions are answered and discussed in **From Underperformance to Beyond Performance**.

Shonaleeka Kaul, associate professor at the Centre for Historical Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi, writes on **Acharya Shankara and the Idea of India: Peregrination as Pedagogy**. In this paper, Kaul discusses Acharya Shankara in relation to the idea of India. This is a relevant exercise not only because Acharya Shankara's life and teachings have a direct bearing on it, but also because the very idea of an India in ancient times has come under drastic attack in modern and recent times. We are told that a country as vast and heterogeneous as India could never have been considered one, and that all attempts since 1947 to forge a unified Indian nation have been nothing more than a precarious statist project rather than the culmination of a long and rich history. This paper attempts to set the record straight, to re-establish the past in discourses about the present, and to re-connect Acharya Shankara with the nation called India.

Gopal Chandra Bhar, honorary professor of physics at the Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda Educational and Research Institute, and former laser scientist at the Burdwan University explains the **Science and Philosophy of Our Inner Transformation**.

Historically the doctrine of divine simplicity, non-duality of God, was strongly advocated by

leading Greek philosophers like Aristotle and Plotinus, Philo of Alexandria, church fathers like Augustine and Dionysius; foremost medieval Christian—Anselm, Thomas Aquinas, and Jewish—Moses. Gopal Stavig, a researcher from Hollywood, USA, writes on **The Simplicity and Non-duality of Brahman-God in Indian and Western Thought**.

The young have wonderful insights on various issues. In *Young Eyes*, such insights are brought to the readers every month. This month, a child shares her thoughts on **How Should be the Married Life of Parents?**

Many wonderful nuggets of wisdom contained in ancient scriptures are difficult to understand. In *Balabodha*, such ancient wisdom is made easy. This month's topic is **Brahmana**. Understanding this popular word is necessary to understand its meaning.

Devotion and faith many times bring about unexpected results, almost miracles. This is shown in the first instalment of the story **The Faith that Brought a Miracle**. This story is this month's *Traditional Tales* and has been translated from the Tamil book *Anmika Kathaigal*.

Kevin J Mitchell, associate professor at the Smurfit Institute of Genetics and the Institute of Neuroscience at Trinity College, Dublin; contributor to *The Future of the Brain: Essays by the World's Leading Neuroscientists* (Princeton) and the author of the popular blog, *Wiring the Brain*, has written the book **How the Wiring of Our Brains Shapes Who We Are**. From this book, we bring you this month's *Manana*.

From Underperformance to Beyond Performance

WE UNDERTAKE TO PERFORM and often underperform. We aim to do a task and have the confidence and ability to do it. However, we have hurdles to tackle. The biggest hurdle is that of lack of clarity. That in turn leads to fear, delusion, and confusion. We get confused about our aims, our confidence wavers, and we think that we would be unable to perform a particular task. We give up before the last lap of the race. Underperformance is seldom about non-performance but more about the lack of will to perform.

Every human being, every living being, and every physical system has an innate capacity of performance. The performance of a human being or a physical system is judged according to its capacity. An ant would be judged by an ant's measure and an elephant by an elephant's measure. It would be stupid and nonsensical to judge an ant by the measure of an elephant or vice versa. Hence, underperformance is not failing to exceed average results, but it is the failure to achieve average or below average results.

All obsessions with the results of any performance would typically lead to underperformance. If one wants to bake a pudding, one cannot afford to check every few minutes if it is coming out well. A sportsman tensed over scores and glued to the scoreboard cannot concentrate on the game. Similarly, if a person concentrates only on what would happen after a particular action is done, it would be impossible to do that

action. The secret is to concentrate on the action at hand and not focus on the result and also not get attached to any particular action itself.

The adverse effect of concentrating on the results of any action is that if one anticipates an

Underperformance is not about non-performance but about the lack of will to perform.

undesirable effect of an action, then one is discouraged from doing the action and the fear of underperformance or adverse performance leads to non-performance. This is exactly what happened to Arjuna on the first day of the Mahabharata War. He had aimed to fight the war and kill Karna. He had no doubt about his ability to fight and win the war. However, he had lack of clarity about his true nature or the true nature of anyone and consequently, he was clueless about the ephemeral nature of the universe. He would have studied about it under his gurus, but had negligible practical experience about it.

With this lack of clarity, when Arjuna went and stood before the opposing army of the Kauravas, he saw his kith and kin arrayed against him. His gurus, cousins, uncles, and grandfathers, were all standing to fight him. His teachers were in arms against him. When he saw this with lack of clarity, Arjuna got afraid, deluded, and confused. Often when we cannot perform, we philosophise, we justify our underperformance. Arjuna did the same. It is

at this juncture that Sri Krishna enlightened Arjuna with a long discourse of teaching that started with chastisement, in fact, Sri Krishna calling names.

We need teachers and preceptors when we underperform. These teachers point to us that the cause of our underperformance is our ego. The causes of suffering, attachment, and underperformance are the ideas of doership and enjoyership. To put it in different terms, the root causes are I-ness, *ahamkara* and mine-ness, *mamakara*. These are two kinds of assertions: one of identity and the other of possession. We identify by possessing. That is why it is not enough for us to love but we want to bind. It is the attempt to assert our egos by doing and enjoying that we end up with failure in both doing and enjoyment.

In short, the reason for our underperformance is the ego. Sri Krishna teaches this to Arjuna in the Bhagavadgita and then brings the proverbial twist in the story: in reality, we do not perform. The reason that we underperform is that we consider ourselves not much different from God! We try to play God all the time and do not stop, though we are constantly reminded of our limitations. Sri Krishna, the Lord, shows us that we do not need to play God and understand that everything is God's play.

All our actions and everything else that happens in the universe are determined by the will of God or by the force of our accumulated tendencies or *samskaras*. Hence, it is God or our karma that performs. It is our ego manifesting as desires that makes us believe that we are doing the actions. So, the method of working is to transcend desires and thereby transcend mind, and understand that we do not do anything in reality. That is why Sri Krishna advises us to concentrate only on the work, not to think of the results, not be attached to work, and most importantly, not to avoid work. The ideal karma-yogi is the person

who understands the inevitability of work and also the permanence of one's true nature that is beyond work.

The goal of jnana yoga or the path of knowledge is to attain the ultimate knowledge, the knowledge of Atman, God, or Brahman. The goal of bhakti yoga or the path of devotion is to attain the highest devotion, devotion to the supreme God. The goal of raja yoga or the path of meditation is to attain complete mastery of the mind. However, the goal of karma yoga or the path of action is not to do more and more work but to attain the state of *naishkarmya*, transcending action. One transcends action because one understands that one does not do action in any circumstance; it is God or karma.

The realisation that there is nothing to perform and that everything that we do is Sisyphean in nature leads us to be rested in our true self, Atman and understand the reality that matter does not matter. When we realise that at the absolute plane, there is no mind, there is nothing to mind. Our lives do not become futile by not performing or underperforming but by performing with an aim to attain some end. Only when we become indifferent to performance and underperformance do we understand that we need to go beyond performance. We do not need to act, but we need to understand the nature of the actor, that is, ourselves.

All actions become meaningful only when they help us understand our true nature and thereby help us transcend actions. The sword of our true nature need not be used but we need to realise that inside the scabbard of our body-mind existence lies the sharpness of a sword that could cut all delusions. There is no need to perform because there is no one who performs. However, this wisdom would dawn only when we excel the art of performance, the art of non-attachment.



Acharya Shankara and the Idea of India: Peregrination as Pedagogy

Shonaleeka Kaul

SPEAKING OF one of the greatest minds in Indian and world intellectual history, Acharya Shankara, this essay will not address the *jagadguru's* masterly exegesis of Vedanta but discuss Acharya Shankara in relation to something central to the collective self-definition of our country, namely, the idea of India. This is a relevant exercise not only because, as I will show, Acharya Shankara's life and teachings have a direct bearing on it, but also because the very idea of an India in ancient times has come under drastic attack in modern and recent times. We are told that a country as vast and heterogeneous as India could never have been considered one, and that all attempts since 1947 to forge a unified Indian nation have been nothing more than a precarious statist project rather than the culmination of a long and rich history. In this essay, I will attempt to set the record straight, to re-establish the past in discourses about the present, and to re-connect Acharya Shankara with the nation called India.

In the year 1880, Sir John Strachey, British administrator and educator, who trained the then-Imperial civil services of India, would begin his lectures to the civil servants with the following statement: 'The first and most important thing to learn about India is that there is not and never was an India.'¹ The deep ignorance of more than three thousand years of Indian history and culture that this reflected should perhaps not be surprising considering the alien mindset and divide-to-rule agenda of the colonial masters then.

What is surprising, however, is that nearly a century and a half later, influential Indian scholars and even one prime minister were denying the existence and even the possibility of an India in premodern times.

Thus in 2005, Manmohan Singh, while addressing an audience in Oxford University, Great Britain, practically thanked the British for colonising India and bestowing on this ancient land such 'beneficial consequences' as the free press and the civil services.² Underlying Singh's controversial gratitude was the assumption that not only did these British institutions supposedly 'modernise' India, they also unified it for the first time by building a common locomotive and bureaucratic framework that we had otherwise lacked. Two years later, in his authoritative book *India after Gandhi*, historian Ramachandra Guha called India 'an unnatural nation', implying, like Singh, that modern developments such as British rule and the Freedom Movement forced a diverse and disconnected bunch of regions and peoples into one, artificial, and unhistorical entity called the Indian nation.³

Now, both politician and historian were clearly operating with a deep-seated teleology—the understanding that the modern period is more influential in shaping a people than the ancient could ever be. More significantly, however, what their statements show is the astonishing hold of colonial and Western thought on Indian intellectual circles till today, more than seventy

years after Indian independence. In fact, so deep is the intellectual dependence on European models of historical development, such as that of German and Italian unification, that the fundamental difference between a nation and a nation state is lost sight of in all these denials of the ancient idea of India. For, unlike a nation-state, a nation is first and foremost a notion: the jointly held sense of belonging to a common territorial and cultural entity that a people name and assert; a community of emotion, of belief, and of praxis; 'a felt community', as Rajat Kanta Ray called it.⁴

And anybody who has even a working acquaintance with the master texts of Indic civilisation and the cultural geography contained in them—texts like the Ramayana, Mahabharata, and the Mahapuranas, composed between fifth century BCE to fifth century CE—will immediately recognise this notion of a felt community and common bounded entity that is affirmed and named as *bharatavarsha* in these seminal texts. Moreover, the precise geographic location and contours of *bharatavarsha* were identified and spelled out. The Mahabharata defined it broadly yet resonantly as 'the land north of the sea and south of the Himalayas', a stable and subcontinental definition, if ever there was one.⁵ Not just geographic, *bharatavarsha*'s ethnic and cultural boundaries were also defined and embraced in this verse from the *Vishnu Purana*:

*Uttaram yat samudrasya
himadreshchaiva dakshinam
Varsham tadbharatam nama
bharati yatra santatih
Yojananam sahasram tu
dvipo ayam dakshinottarat
Purve kirata yasyante pashchime yavanah sthitah.*

North of the sea and south of the Himalayas
That country is Bharata and
her children Bharati.
A thousand *yojanas* from north to south
It has Kiratas in the east and Yavanas in the west.⁶

Can there be a more explicit and clear understanding of a nation called India? One need not even go into other, later testimonies, such as that of Xuan Xang, the Chinese Buddhist pilgrim and traveller, who toured India in the late sixth and early seventh century CE, and writes in his travelogue *Su Yi Ki*, that as he stood in Nagarahara in modern Jalalabad, west of the Khyber Pass in today's Afghanistan, he felt he stood at the gateway to the country called 'Indu'.⁷ That he referred to India and not merely the Indus plains is evident from the way he described this country, again, in classical terms as bounded by the snowy mountains to the north and the sea on three sides, and extending to an area of ninety thousand li, a Chinese mile equal to five hundred metre, and being inhabited by seventy different kingdoms.

Thus the view that India was geographically and culturally too diverse to ever be one nation ignores the fact that the ancient Indian concept of 'nation' could well recognise and embrace that diversity. The point behind both the above historical testimonies is that regardless of a vibrant pluralism inhabiting India that is acknowledged by ancient sources, there was also acknowledged a common unified sphere of cultural circulation and a unified episteme. It is in the context of this common unified episteme called India that I wish to discuss Acharya Shankara's teachings and voyages.

There is intense and futile debate over the dates and the precise life history of Acharya Shankara, the sum total of which, as Swami Tapasyananda in his translation of the *Shankara Digvijaya* puts it, is to perhaps generate a 'learned ignorance' and sometimes also make Acharya Shankara out to be a shadowy figure of legend rather than history.⁸ What is not appreciated in Acharya Shankara's anonymity is that personal identity was not significant in the

Advaita tradition and the quest for the historical Acharya Shankara is perhaps only an Occidental obsession with personality and the individual.

Be that as it may, the bare minimum facts that are known beyond doubt about the life of the great sage are that he was born in Kalady, Kerala, in South India, circa 700 CE and died in Kedarnath, Uttarakhand, North India. He took *sannyasa*, monastic vows, at a tender age, mastered the Upanishads, the Bhagavadgita, and the *Brahma Sutra*, on all of which he wrote brilliant commentaries and in the process, by the sheer rigour of his argumentation and sharp refutation of opposing philosophies, established the supremacy and unassailable status of Vedanta. At the heart of Vedanta according to Acharya Shankara was the principle of Advaita.

Often translated as non-duality by modern scholars working with European categories of monism and dualism, the far more nuanced concept of 'Advaita' has been explained perhaps more accurately by Jaqueline G Suthren Hirst as unified consciousness, one without a second.⁹ It is the idea of a self-reflexive consciousness that is beyond multiplicity, Advaita, and has no attributes, *nirguna*. Hirst emphasises Acharya Shankara as a teacher par excellence, guru, rather than only an exegete or spiritual commentator. Among his teaching methods, she shows, were techniques such as questioning, renunciation, negation, interiorisation, methods that imitated the pedagogical techniques found in the Upanishads themselves, *shrutivat*, and the unique advantage of which was to aid the students' realisation, not cognition, of knowledge, which was the ultimate reality of Brahman (6, 9). This pedagogy aimed at experience, *anubhava*, of true knowledge rather than mere explication, since the nature of that knowledge transcended words and description. It was knowledge from which words turned back, *yato vacho nivartante aprapya manasa saha*,

as the *Taittiriya Upanishad* puts it.¹⁰ It related to a transcendent reality that was beyond perception or cognition, hence *para*, transcendent and *aprameya*, beyond proof of perception. So Acharya Shankara's pedagogy was simultaneously praxis, and one which was directed at realisation of this unitary ultimate consciousness.


Now, what was the spatial context for Acharya Shankara's pedagogy and praxis? In other words, where did he teach the gospel of Advaita and to whom? It is a tribute to the cosmopolitan and universal Sanskrit language and thought-world that the area of its knowledge systems and debates was not confined to the region of their origins but could spread and circulate across the length and breadth of a vast area that stretched from central Asia to south east Asia with the whole of South Asia or India as its fulcrum. The extent of Acharya Shankara's scholarship, while it corroborates the supra-regional character of Sanskrit learning as it was not confined to Kerala or even South India, displays at the same time a very special order of territorial awareness.

This order of territorial awareness was laid out by Acharya Shankara himself with, I suggest, a good deal of self-consciousness via his famous *digvijayas*, triumphant tours of the land wherein Acharya Shankara and his cohort of disciples travelled from one centre of learning to another, debating intensely the local scholarship, defeating it and proceeding to assert the supremacy of Advaita over a host of other schools of thought. One of the main sources that details these peregrinations of Acharya Shankara is Madhava Vidyaranya's thirteenth-century hagiography, *Shankara Digvijaya*. It tells us that Acharya Shankara set out from Kalady in Kerala and traversed first to Rameshwaram, then Kanchipuram in Tamil Nadu, then Andhra, Vidarbha, and Karnataka, defeating in particular tantric Shaivas like the Bhairavas and Kapalikas,

whereafter he reached the shores of the western sea and then Gokarna, Saurashtra, Dvaraka, defeating along the way Vaishnavas, Shaivas, Shaktas, and Sauras, onwards to Ujjaini in Madhya Pradesh, Bahlika, probably Bactria, Shurasena or Mathura, Darads in Gilgit Baltistan, Kuru, Panchala in Punjab and Haryana, and then Kamarupa in Assam, and Koshala in Uttar Pradesh, Anga, Gauda in Bengal, defeating Shaktas, Pashupatas, and Kshapanakas.

A fitting culmination of these travels was in Kashmir, we learn, where the ultimate victory of Acharya Shankara's prodigious intellect was symbolised in his ascension of the throne of omniscience, *sarvajna-pitha* at the renowned Sharada temple on the banks of the Kishenganga, today's Neelam village, just north of the Line of Control. History also resonates with this epic visit of Acharya Shankara to Kashmir in so far as the ancient temple of Jyeshtheshvara, founded by a descendant of the Mauryan King Ashoka at Srinagar, is more popularly known as the temple of Acharya Shankara. We also know that Acharya Shankara established four *mathas*, monasteries, in the four extremities of *bharatavarsha*, as it were: Badrinath in the north, Puri in the east, Shringeri in the south, and Dvaraka in the west. Thus, it needs no labouring to see that not only these four centres but the entire itinerary of his peregrinations, his *digvijaya*, corresponds to the extent of the modern nation, India.

While this is not an original observation and many scholars have made it before, including the philosopher-President of India, Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, who suggested that Acharya Shankara was being 'a shrewd political genius (rather a patriot)' in his choice of the location of these *mathas*.¹¹ However, my explanation is something else. I believe that Acharya Shankara's voyages or peregrinations were not patriotism, nor were they only polemics; they were also pedagogy. They were

meant to simultaneously effect and demonstrate a sphere peopled by great diversity of thought, like *bharatavarsha*, but unified by Advaita, which pierced through the illusion of multiplicity. India, then, provided a laboratory for Acharya Shankara, one that mirrored both the bewildering variety of samsara, the illusory world and the ultimate oneness, *ekatma* of Brahman, the absolute, pure consciousness. The pan-India coverage of his voyages was a self-conscious choice for pedagogic effect. And in the process, Acharya Shankara's *digvijaya* both attested to and reasserted the unity of *bharatavarsha*, that is, India. 

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3. Ramachandra Guha, *India After Gandhi: The History of the World's Largest Democracy* (New York: Harper Collins, 2007), 7.
4. See Rajat Kanta Ray, *The Felt Community: Commonality and Mentality Before The Emergence of Indian Nationalism* (New Delhi: Oxford University, 2003).
5. *India: A Sacred Geography*, 64.
6. *Vishnu Purana*, 2.3.1, 8. A *yojana* is about 123 kilometre.
7. Shonaleeka Kaul, *The Making of Early Kashmir: Landscape and Identity in the Rajatarangini* (Delhi: Oxford University, 2018), 157.
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Science and Philosophy of Our Inner Transformation

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Our Inner Time:

Psychological and Physiological

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA SAID: 'If we are developed from animals, the animals also may be degraded men. ... Our struggle for the higher life shows that we have been degraded from a high state.'¹ Time flies, crawls, and races. Like tide, time waits for none, but in dramatic moments it also stands still. There are popular accounts of how Albert Einstein's relativity theory could be explained to a layperson: 'An hour sitting with a pretty girl on a park bench passes like a minute, but a minute sitting on a hot stove seems like an hour.'² This is psychological time and has to do with how hard or

warm we experience the passage of time. This is determined by our attachment, emotion, and so on, by the degree of attention to events when they occur. It is a personal time generated within our body, which is perhaps best understood as against our awareness of common chronological time. It passes relatively swiftly for us while we are enjoying an activity, but it slows down dramatically if we are waiting anxiously for something we like.

The elasticity of this kind of time is perhaps best appreciated when we are the spectators of the performance of a concert or a lecture or in meditation. We have another time called physiological time, which consists of a series of organic

changes undergone within a human being from the beginning of one's embryonic life to one's death. Some of these states are rhythmic and reversible, while others are progressive and irreversible. Our bodies are chock-full of living clocks that govern us all along. Physical time is foreign to us, whereas this inner physiological time is of our own spring from within. Solar time flows at a uniform rate consisting of equal intervals. But the physiological time differs from one person to another. The body is an ensemble of organic movements, whose rhythm is very fast during infancy, much less rapid during youth, and very slow in maturity and old age, when our physiological activities begin to weaken our mind.

It is because of the different individual physiological times, that physical and mental maturity come early for some and late to others. But society never thinks of advancing schooling age for someone who reached early mental maturity nor does it think of lengthening retirement age of one beyond sixty to those having their physical and mental capabilities intact. It is also in the same context that we, particularly in a joint family, experience a generation gap between young children and their grandparents, and even between children and their parents in these days. Because of this generation gap they live in different temporal worlds in spite of living in the same family.³ And for the same reason, a mother cannot treat her daughter as her own sister. Our failure to match in social structures, the rapid gains in longevity, health, and style of life has led to such unintended consequence of creating a poor fit between social institutions and people's capabilities and responsibilities at every age.

We all have the same amount of time but it is just a matter of how we utilise it. In order to produce greater results, one is required to change one's strategy with respect to time. On the

Internet, time has, in essence, triumphed over space. The temporal boundary that separates one place from another is abolished by making the entire world a global village. Only proper time management can bring success in life. Thomas à Kempis said: 'You will always be glad at evening if you have spent the day well.'⁴

Our Inner World and Outer World

Carl Jung, the noted psychiatrist and psychotherapist of the last century, on studying human behaviour, classified them as extrovert and introvert.⁵ These people make decisions based on two very different sets of criteria: thinking and feeling. When a decision is based on logic and reason, they are in the thinking mode. When a decision is based on a value system, they are operating in the feeling mode. Our entire life is not fully governed by either, though decisions are made entirely by thinking or feeling processes. Most decisions involve some thinking and some feeling. Normally the thinking mode comes from the brain while the feeling mode comes from the heart. We all are accustomed to both the modes, but we often put more trust on one mode or the other depending upon our inbuilt or inherent values like the two categories of our inner time. But the parents want their children to be specialised in their chosen field without any attention to the children's inbuilt talent or tendencies. The dynamics of both these worlds are entirely different like inner times.

The extrovert category naturally likes to stay with the external world of friends, television, mobile, and so on in their leisure time, while the introvert category prefers to be with their own internal world even forgetting their body-self. Each is imprisoned in its own activity. We know much about the outer world, yet very little of the world within us. That's why our environment wields such inordinate control over us. For

people belonging to the extrovert category, it is very difficult to enter into the spiritual world, where the primary need is silencing the mind itself as demanded by yoga scriptures. Sri Ramakrishna's basic message for us, especially those entering spiritual life, is the harmonisation of one's thought and speech. Success, even in worldly activity, demands that it should be in tune with thinking and speaking.

Our entire educational system aims at teaching how to tackle the external world irrespective of one's internal world. The so-called gentle-people, established in worldly knowledge, constantly try to run their life through suppression of truths of their inner world. Danah Zohar and Dr Ian Marshall rightly commented while connecting intelligence with spiritual intelligence: 'From the moment we begin school we are trained to look outward rather than inward, to focus on facts and practical problems in the external world, to be goal-oriented. Virtually nothing in Western education encourages us to reflect on ourselves, on our inner lives and motives.'⁶ This internal world is full of tendencies of our earlier life remaining dormant in the subconscious mind.

One becomes successful if one's inner world is strong. Only for children and the insane, the two worlds are the same since they do not usually talk rationally with reference to reality in the present world. Children are loved by all due to this simplicity. To be spiritual one has to go through a transformation of one's inner world from one's inbuilt samskaras. Mere outward or objective transformation makes one religious. For spirituality, one needs subjective transformation and this requires prolonged and rigorous spiritual practice for many years and a genuine spiritual experience must transform the character of the experiencer. Inner life primarily concerns one as a spiritual being. One can become learned by another's learning but can be wise only by one's

own wisdom. The discoveries of the inner worlds of Moses, Jesus Christ, Buddha, and Sri Ramakrishna are far greater than the discoveries of Columbus and Newton.

We usually live in the outer world almost unaware of our inner world. But spiritual persons usually live in their inner world. Sri Ramakrishna could stay in both the worlds, a special characteristic state termed as *bhavamukha* in Sri Ramakrishna literature. The expression of such state often comes out through a Bengali song: '*Dub dub dub rup sagare amar mon*; O my mind, dive deep into the inner world of gems.' Sri Ramakrishna also used to sing the mystic poet Ramprasad's Bengali song: '*Mon tumi krishi kaj jano na*; O mind, you do not know how to cultivate the land.'

Apart from this, some dedicated scientists, artists, and litterateurs also often live in their inner world. Their behaviour in the outer world is often seen as insane. This happened to the English poet P B Shelley and to some of the great scientists as well. This harmonisation is the greatest problem that one faces in life. That's why Swamiji said:

We are caught, though we came to catch. We came to enjoy; we are being enjoyed. We came to rule; we are being ruled. We came to work; we are being worked. All the time, we find that. And this comes into every detail of our life. We are being worked upon by other minds, and we are always struggling to work on other minds. We want to enjoy the pleasures of life; and they eat into our vitals. We want to get everything from nature, but we find in the long run that nature takes everything from us—depletes us, and casts us aside.⁷

The Architecture of Our Subconscious and Conscious mind

Our thoughts and emotions comprising our mood and sentiments produce strong

impressions on the face, which is like an advertisement board depicting what is going on inside the mind. On the face, one can hardly hide our thoughts though we may foolishly think that we have kept up our thoughts in secret. Thoughts of lust, greed, jealousy, anger, revenge, hatred, and so on, at once produce their vivid expressions on the face.

All memories, feelings, and thoughts that are out of conscious awareness are by definition 'unconscious', also termed as the subconscious. The conscious mind is constantly supported by unconscious resources. By halting our thoughts, stilling our minds, engaging in mental silence, we give ourselves mental rest, when it comes up with the very best of thoughts that can deliver more truths of life. Yoga is an exalted state of the mind. It starts with stopping of the thinking process. The aim of yoga is not only to control the surface of the mind but also to rein the mind in depth, thereby requiring establishment in moral values. It is self-administered, drugless psychotherapy.

Access to the subconscious mind therefore comes from calming the surface and on coming in contact with certain external factors when the necessary conditions are fulfilled for these subtle impressions to manifest. And this may happen while going to sleep, under drug or alcohol, or even in coma when the play of conscious mind is withdrawn, even though the subconscious mind continues to control all the vital processes and functions of our body. Most activities of the human brain are unconscious and routine. The condition of a person's vegetative life is regulated in an unconscious fashion. Without any conscious choice on our part, our heart is kept functioning automatically, and the vital functions of digestion, blood circulation, and breathing are carried on by our subconscious mind through processes independent of our conscious control.

Almost all of our activities involve subconscious to conscious processing. So all the conscious processes are bound to be influenced by unconscious pre-conditions, such as past experience and emotions. Every thought, word, or act of a person goes to form her or his tendencies, impressions in the subconscious state. That's why Swamiji warned us to be careful about what we do or think. What we are and do in the conscious mind is on the surface. An iceberg floating on water can serve as a useful metaphor to understand this unconscious mind. As only a small percentage of the whole iceberg is visible above the surface, the conscious mind is like the top of an iceberg, a small portion of the whole. We spend our entire life living on this surface of the mind. That's why the mystic Bengali poet Kazi Nazrul Islam lamented that our entire life is spent in floating on the surface while it should have been a deep inward-flowing river: '*Tomar jale roilam beshe jonam obdhi*; I have been floating on your waters all my life.'

Imagine our life as a flowing river. Throughout our life, we keep on floating on the surface of the river. Spiritual life is an attempt to go beyond the limitations of our present state and can be achieved only by transforming the conscious mind. There are three states of the mind: unconscious, conscious, and superconscious. The unconscious, apart from the instinctive drives, is a storehouse of samskaras or past tendencies. The instinctive mind is also the seat of passions, desires, sensations, and feelings of the lower order that we have in common with animals. The intellect is the mental principle that separates humans from lower animals. Our education system is aimed to enrich this. Apart from the intellect, the conscious mind comprises concepts, emotions, imagination, and intuition.

The next higher level is the awakening of the intuitive mind, being a part of the

superconscious mind, which sets in motion spiritual powers. The intellect uses the rational mind, while the intuitive mind uses the heart. The inspiration for transformation comes from the awakened heart, but the natural tendency is to follow the dominant mandate of our in-born habits in spite of better promptings. Sri Krishna rightly said in the Bhagavadgita that it is a natural tendency for one to go after one's own in-built nature. Even a wise person, aware of good and bad qualities, acts according to, in keeping with, one's own disposition or nature. Therefore, all living beings conform to and follow their nature.⁸

The conscious mind of the experiencer continues to create impressions under the surface of the mind and carry on as memory in the subconscious mind, but if we go deeper into the unconscious mind, we cannot readily remember. It is well known that our perceptions and cognitions are overwhelmingly determined by our subconscious minds. We are moved by our impulses, habits, and tendencies which are embedded in our subconscious minds. Thus, we live in the past and are not anxious to live in the present. In spite of our best efforts, we are forced to do certain actions, which are harmful, not only once, but repeatedly. When we are directed by an impulse, all our controls slip away, though we regret it later. Arjuna asks Sri Krishna in the Gita: 'Impelled by what does a person, though unwillingly, engage oneself in wrongdoings, as if compelled by force?' (3.36). All this behaviour only verifies that we are governed by our subconscious mind and that the conscious mind is of not much help. When we try to concentrate in meditation, the mind is also distracted to catch the depth as we normally cannot control the subconscious mind. So, the subconscious mind has a major role in shaping the future and the character of an individual.



There is no physical or chemical process to wipe out the imprints of the subconscious mind. Our mind is a slave to unexpected and undesirable forces lurking within us. The law of mass action in physical chemistry, propounded by Cato Maximilian Guldberg (1836–1902) and Peter Waage (1833–1900), says that the direction and dynamics of a chemical reaction are determined by the remaining amount of reactants: 'The substitution force, other conditions being equal, is directly proportional to the product

of the masses provided each is raised to a particular exponent.⁹ This law can also be stated in these words: 'At constant temperature, the rate of a chemical reaction is directly proportional to the active mass of the reactant present at that time.'¹⁰

The mind also operates on the same lines. Sri Krishna says in the Gita: 'For, by that very past practice, one is carried forward even in spite of oneself.'¹¹ The good and bad tendencies remaining in our subconscious mind will simply overcome the mind by their sheer mass and might put a person on a particular track, through the efforts made in previous births stored as seeds in samskaras. If the tendencies with which a person is born are good, the growth would be conducive to spiritual well-being. The abovementioned law says that the momentum of these tendencies will carry one a long way and a little effort will meet with great success.

There is no disparity in the world that one usually grumbles about. It is solely one's actions in this or previous life that cause apparently whimsical effects. The impressions of past acts will follow like shadows throughout one's life and there is no escape from it. There is no physical or chemical process by which one could wipe out all the imprints of past actions. In this context the thoughts of the French mathematician and moralist Blaise Pascal (1623–662) challenge us: 'We never keep ourselves to the present moment. We look forward to the future as too slow in coming, as if to hasten its arrival, or we remember the past to hold it up as if it had happened too quickly. We are so undiscerning that we stray into times which are not our own and do not think of the only one that is truly ours, and so vain that we dream about those which no longer exist and allow the present to escape without thinking about it.'¹²

Transformation:

The Role of Neuroplasticity

Spiritual life is an overall transformation from different bodily and mental states. It involves turning inward and withdrawing from the external environment. But our present attitude, behaviour, and reactions are largely determined by our past experiences, as highlighted earlier, and continues to disturb our present life. For a spiritual aspirant, it is important to weed the mind out of all unwanted subconscious impressions and tendencies. We are to undermine the baser inclinations that have taken root in our subconscious mind. It is possible to sow the desired plant only after replacing the weeds from the ground and making it fertile. The furrows that have been dug should be smoothened by the newly ploughed ones. It is like cleaning an old dirty inkpot requiring persistent pouring of clean water, much like pouring good thoughts into the subconscious mind by the conscious mind. Apart from the conscious mind, our mind is comprised of the unconscious mind, lying below the conscious mind, and the superconscious that lies above the conscious mind. Thus, one has to organise three categories of transformations:

Transformation within the subconscious mind • The main fight in controlling the mind is against these impressions because they influence, inspire, and affect our creative urge. Planning is necessary to fight against these impressions with the conscious mind. Much of the early struggle in spiritual life is to free the conscious from the hold of the unconscious.

Transformation of the subconscious mind to the conscious mind • The more one's past is rediscovered and accepted, the more the unconscious mind gets transformed into conscious mind.

Transformation of the conscious mind to the superconscious • This superconscious is also

called *turiya* or transcendent when the mind is freed from all impressions, both of the conscious and subconscious levels.

To obtain anything in life, we must first examine whether our pre-programmed subconscious mind is right and is in tune with our present wish. If it is not in line with the wish, we better bring changes in our mindset and alter the programming. The best way to overcome the previous programming is to replace that programming with new programming. This means continued affirmations. We were programmed to do every single step we take. Every word we heard from someone, we took it and placed into our conscious mind.

All inputs to the conscious mind go into the subconscious mind for processing, which in turn creates a reaction, or what was processed is stored in memory for later retrieval. On coming in contact with certain external factors like environment, association, and so on, the necessary conditions are fulfilled for these inbuilt impressions to manifest. Everyone is born with a certain spiritual potential and if this is not actuated to the full extent, one's life would be in vain.¹³ If one does not consciously avoid impure company, one will be unable to remove evil tendencies from the mind. Bad company is easier to avoid by the conscious mind but the effect of our former imprinted bad company and impure thoughts thereof is far more troublesome to get rid of.

The seeds of desires are to be burnt, for which the first step is getting established in moral disciplines. Removal of bad *samskaras* is the solution suggested by Sri Ramakrishna and great masters. This means that the mind needs forcible and repeated assertion of higher nature and good *samskaras*, which are taken over by the subconscious mind. If the inbuilt tendencies with which a person is born are dominantly good and

the environment provided for one's growth is conducive to spiritual well-being, the momentum of these tendencies can carry her or him a long way and a little exertion or effort will meet with great success. So one should start filling the mind with nobler thoughts, clean bad *samskaras* with good ones since our brain and psyche are plastic organs.

The mind is forced to be occupied with good thoughts. One should continue to think spiritual thoughts or the precepts of Vedanta till one falls asleep and till death, as goes the popular adage of Vedanta: '*Asubteramriteh kalam nayet Vedanta chintaya*'; spend time on thinking Vedantic thoughts till you fall asleep.' The mind can be controlled through habit and dispassion as said in the Gita.¹⁴ Sri Krishna also says that patiently, little by little, one must free oneself from all mental distractions with the aid of intelligent will (6.25).

Modern science supports this through the principles of neuroplasticity. According to neuroplasticity, thinking, learning, and acting actually changes both the brain's functional and physical anatomy. Neuroplasticity allows adaptation to any and all experiences, good or bad, and the changes we may encounter, freeing us from merely responding reflexively as a consequence of genetically determined hardwiring. The plasticity of the brain works in two directions; it is responsible for deleting old connections as frequently as it enables the creation of new ones.¹⁵ It means it has the ability to learn, adapt to its environment with all the challenges brought with it, and acquire new knowledge from fresh experiences throughout an individual's lifetime.

This happens through a change in the strength of the neural connections, adding or removing connections, and by the formation of new cells. This means that we have the potential

for successful intervention, but it also means that planned and unplanned interventions may have undesired, direct and indirect effects. Of course, what is desirable to one person may be undesirable to another. Some of our most stubborn habits and disorders are products of our plasticity. Once a particular plastic change occurs in the brain and becomes well established, it can prevent other changes from occurring. It obeys two key principles: requires repetition and an appropriate amount of intensity. According to yogis, it takes a practice of twelve years to achieve this plastic change.

With the attainment of these qualities, the automatic power that one generates in oneself is a spontaneous energy that speaks in its own language. It is the language of nature itself. It is the feeling of things, which is different from psychological functions. These feelings, which are supernormal, are nothing but the vibrations that are produced in harmony with the natural system of things. But our practice really helps us to break down the obstacles as the cultivator does for the irrigation of land as illustrated in Patanjali's *Yoga Sutra*.¹⁶ All weakness is dropped with one's original, natural divine perfection rendered free and fully manifest.

Some Indications of Inner Transformation

One cannot find one's own drawbacks until one has lived a life of continence. It is through pain and failures that one might reach the summit of spiritual life. But experience is the highest proof when it comes to changing one's temperament and outlook of life. Such a person does not display her or his strength but the very appearance, attitude, and behaviour reveal strength. Just like a thoughtful person may learn much of God's wisdom and goodness amidst the solitude of nature and its salient laws. In the words of Sri

Ramakrishna: 'When flowers bloom in the deep woods, the bees find them.'¹⁷ Further one cannot know and be a great judge of oneself, since facial expression, body language, words, behaviour, and actions can really be judged by others. Listed below are some of the visible qualities that signify inner transformation:

Tolerance: Progress in spiritual life is visualised through the experience of awakenings like conversion of ethical precepts into conduct and training oneself to be conscientious, detached, and temperate. As a result, inner struggle would appear to one, who otherwise has a truce with the lower mind. The attitude of a person with a developed mind is that we are not the only ones in the world who have been singled out to struggle, and these struggles are not to last forever.

A New Set of Values: When one grows to appreciate one's inner self, the attachment to the outer world gradually diminishes. Most relevant in this context is the quote of the Greek cynic philosopher Diogenes while roaming in a market: 'How many things I can do without.'¹⁸ One will perhaps be able to develop a new set of values. Conserve mental energy by philosophically accepting inevitabilities of life, diseases and old age, fortunes, and karmic forces.

Sensitivity: The development of a high degree of sensitivity of the sense organs in worldly dealings is an asset in spiritual life. Normally, the degree of human sensitivity varies from person to person. Some require physical assault, some rude words, while for the most sensitive, a mere gesture is enough for conveying disapproval. Nerves become more susceptible even to subtle forms of joys and sorrows. Such a person sees suffering everywhere as pointed by Patanjali's *Yoga Sutra*.¹⁹ This means that most discriminative persons can see everything in the world as full of sorrow. The Gita says that just as fire is covered with smoke, every endeavour in this world is associated with some defects.²⁰ In this world anything having creative power is also

associated with destructive power. For example, water extinguishes fire but the very constituent of water, oxygen, when brought in contact with hydrogen, bursts into fire.

Suffering: We do not always think best in our cool hour. Tremor and sadness often agitate the soul far more powerfully than joy or security. They inject emotion and sentiments higher in intensity and momentum. The aspirant sees that all worldly suffering is a God-given opportunity for one's own spiritual benefit as if for testing one's strength and forbearance. The ideal of mukti becomes real only when one feels intense suffering. It is the time when the inner force acts in full extent.

A spiritual aspirant relates all problems in life with God. It is God's way to infuse in us the required strength to go through the inner struggles. Even great litterateurs like Rabin-dranath Tagore, mystic poets Atul Prasad Sen and Rajanikanta Sen created their best in the times of their difficulties. The Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi said: 'Misery is truly a gift of God. I believe it is a symbol of His compassion.'²¹ 'Misery is a greater teacher than happiness', said Swamiji.²² The famous prayer to the Lord by Kunti, mother of the Pandavas, in the Bhagavata, illustrates that a true spiritual seeker aspires difficulties all through to get the presence of the Almighty just to develop one's discriminative power: 'I wish there were more of those calamities, oh Master of the universe, so that we could meet you again and again, for meeting you means that one no longer is confronted with a material existence.'²³

Acceptance: Accept all things as they come due to the effects of past actions and develop the wisdom to tackle situations without complaining and keeping an open mind. Everything that we encounter, read, or hear has something to teach us. A thoughtful person learns much of Almighty's wisdom and goodness amidst solitudes of nature and its laws like the Avadhuta in the Bhagavata.

Non-attachment: Develop dispassion towards the objects of the senses. When one passes through moral and spiritual tempests the test is whether we are becoming less attached; when the mind is away from sense objects, whether we are able to stand on our own feet. When one grows in inner values and the attachment to the outer world gradually diminishes, then one will perhaps be able to tolerate a few harsh remarks about this outer covering, thereby developing a new outlook.

Sublimation of Ego: The greatest sign of spiritual development is the sublimation of ego, which drops down to a minimum. In the language of Sri Ramakrishna, such a developed and sublimated ego is the ripe ego. Jesus Christ said: 'Thy will be done.'²⁴ One will have no separate will for oneself. The personality is totally merged with one's chosen ideal. Such a person will not display her or his strength or fear anybody else in the world as there is no duality. With the opening of spiritual vision, the inner meaning of everything becomes clear and thereby attains an unimaginable progress in any work.

The Golden Law of Adjustment: If, however, one wants to lead an idealistic life, one is required to follow Sri Ramakrishna, who taught the Holy Mother to 'adjust one's conduct according to time, place, and circumstances.'²⁵ He connects every action, every experience to spiritual growth. In the words of Swamiji: 'Adjust the microcosm (which is in your power to do) and the macrocosm will itself adjust for you.'²⁶

Conclusion

We are merged in our own world by creating our own inner time, psychological and physiological, the inner world through our inbuilt samskaras. 'The world is God and is real, but that is not the world we see. ... "taking the thing for what is not" ... We see reality, but distorted by the medium through which we see it', said Swamiji in

the *Inspired Talks* (7.33). So we have to struggle to control, to overcome, through scriptural disciplines including yoga. Swamiji assured: 'Relative knowledge is good, because it leads to absolute knowledge' (ibid.).

If the intentions and practices are sincere, selfless, and unwavering, matters are so arranged that one shall acquire requisite aids for spiritual pursuit from the so-called distorted medium as occasions arise. Thus, all the so-called resistance would cease, the personality becomes a fit vehicle for the transmission of perfection, as is illustrated in Patanjali's *Yoga Sutra*, which has this to say about the practice of truthfulness: 'Once a state of truth has been permanently established, each statement will form the basis for a truthful result.'²⁷ The practice of truthfulness develops and purifies the intellect in a remarkable manner and the mind of a person, who has acquired perfection in this virtue becomes like a mirror reflecting the divine Mind to some extent. One has to develop truthfulness to such a high degree. Such an aspirant becomes a mirror of truth and whatever one says or does reflects that truth. Naturally, whatever such a person says will come true; whatever such a person attempts to accomplish will be accomplished. ❧

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The Simplicity and Non-duality of Brahman-God in Indian and Western Thought

Gopal Stavig

HISTORICALLY the doctrine of divine simplicity, non-duality of God, was strongly advocated by leading Greek philosophers like Aristotle and Plotinus, Philo of Alexandria, church fathers like Augustine and Dionysius; foremost medieval Christian—Anselm, Thomas Aquinas, Jewish—Moses Maimonides, and Muslim—Avicenna—thinkers; and many others. The divine attribute of simplicity means that Brahman-God is one without composition—non-dual; an undivided, undifferentiated, and a part-less unity. All of its attributes are identical with Brahman-God and with each other.¹

From the non-dualistic standpoint, Acharya

Shankara comprehended that *nirguna* 'Brahman is without parts or attributes. It is subtle, absolute, taintless, one without a second. In Brahman there is no diversity whatsoever. Brahman is indefinable, beyond the range of mind and speech, one without a second.'² Without internal differentiations—*nirvishesa*—or external relations, Brahman is undifferentiated and undivided, existing as a non-composite non-dual unity.³

Brahman becomes subject to all kinds of (phenomenal) actions like transformation, on account of the differences of aspects, constituted by name and form, which remain either differentiated or nondifferentiated, which cannot be determined either as real or unreal, and



Swami Vivekananda in London, December 1896

which are imagined through ignorance. In Its real aspect Brahman remains unchanged [immutable] and beyond all phenomenal actions. And since the differences of name and form, brought about by ignorance, are ushered into being through mere speech, the partlessness of Brahman is not violated.⁴

Swami Vivekananda emphasised that *nirguna* Brahman is part-less, without composition or extension, timeless, not a compound of matter and energy, or an effect of something else, *aseity*, and therefore is indestructible and not subject to death, eternal.

Everything that is a compound can be seen or imagined. That which we cannot imagine or perceive, which we cannot bind together, is not force or matter, cause or effect, and cannot be a compound. The domain of compounds is only so far as our mental universe, our thought universe extends. Beyond this it does not hold good; it is as far as law reigns, and if there is

anything beyond law, it cannot be a compound at all. The Self [Atman] of man being beyond the law of causation, is not a compound.⁵

The Soul [Atman] is not a compound; It is the only eternal simple in the universe, and as such, It cannot be born, It cannot die; It is immortal, indestructible, the ever-living essence of intelligence (1.234).

Infinity cannot be divided, it always remains infinite. If it could be divided, each part would be infinite. And there cannot be two infinities. Suppose there were, one would limit the other, and both would be finite. Infinity can only be one, undivided. Thus the conclusion will be reached that the infinite is one and not many, and that one Infinite Soul [Atman] is reflecting itself through thousands and thousands of mirrors, appearing as so many different souls. It is the same Infinite Soul, which is the background of the universe, that we call God. The same Infinite Soul also is the background of the human mind which we call the human soul (2.431).

There is but one Infinite Being in the universe, and that Being appears as you and I; but this appearance of divisions is after all a delusion. He has not been divided, but only appears to be divided. This apparent division is caused by looking at Him through the network of time, space, and causation. When I look at God through the network of time, space, and causation, I see Him as the material world. ... and that Being we are. I am That, and you are That. Not parts of It, but the whole of It (3.8).

Concerning divine simplicity Thomas Aquinas (1225–74), the Italian Catholic, wrote:

For there is neither composition of quantitative parts in God, since He is not a body [incorporeal]; nor composition of form and matter; nor does His nature differ from His *suppositum* [individual substance] ... neither is there in Him composition of genus [*samanya*] and difference, nor of subject and accident. Therefore, it is clear that God is in no way composite, but is

altogether simple. Secondly, because every composite is posterior to its component parts, and is dependent on them; but God is the first being, as has been shown above. Thirdly, because every composite has a cause, for things in themselves diverse cannot unite unless something causes them to unite. But God is uncaused [*aseity/ svasiddha*], as has been shown above, since He is the first efficient cause. Fourthly, because in every composite there must be potentiality [*anabhivyakta*] and actuality [*abhivyakta*] (this does not apply to God) for either one of the parts actualizes another, or at least all the parts are as it were in potency with respect to the whole.⁶

Every composite, furthermore, is potentially dissoluble. ... This does not befit God, since He is through Himself the Necessary Being. ... Prior to all multitude we must find unity. But there is multitude in every composite. Therefore, that which is before all things, namely, God, must be free from all composition.⁷

In God intellect [knower-subject], the thing understood [known-object], and the act of understanding [knowing-combines subject and object] are one and the same.⁸

In God, power, essence, will, intellect, wisdom, and justice are one and the same (1.25.5; 267).

Power is predicated of God not as something really distinct from His knowledge and will, but as differing from them logically; inasmuch (namely) as power implies the notion of a principle putting into execution what the will commands and what knowledge directs (1.25.1; 260).

God however as considered in Himself, is altogether one and simple, yet our intellect knows Him according to diverse conceptions because it cannot see Him as He is in Himself (1.13.12; 133).

Thomas Aquinas does not teach the non-duality of the world, being that he accepts the existence of a real objective, pluralistic universe.

Yet he does advocate the monistic non-duality of God as being a simple, undivided oneness, without composition, having no internal relations; not separated into quantitative or qualitative, dual or pluralistic components. For Advaitins, Brahman is *nirguna*—without attributes or qualities, but for Aquinas, God is *ekaguna* or *aikyaguna*—all attributes or qualities are reducible to one. For him *ekaguna* God is omniscient, yet its understanding is a non-propositional, non-inferential, timelessly undifferentiated intuition that we as humans cannot comprehend.

In addition, Aquinas explains the non-duality of God from the transcendent, external, objective, ontological perspective. He, like Aristotle and unlike the Indians, is not much concerned with the non-duality of God from the immanent, internal, subjective, psychological standpoint. Consequently, he has little to say about God as the essential Self—Atman, the witness-self—*sakshin*, or the indwelling inner guide and ruler—*antaryamin*.

The philosopher William James (1842–1910), an admirer of Swamiji, whom he met and conversed with, explains simplicity and its implications:

He [God] is *simple metaphysically* also, that is to say, his nature and his existence cannot be distinct, as they are in finite substances which share their formal natures with one another, and are individual only in their material aspect. Since God is one and only, His *essentia* [essence] and his *esse* [existence] must be given at one stroke. This excludes from his being all those distinctions, so familiar in the world of finite things, between potentiality and actuality, substance and accidents, being and activity, existence and attributes. We can talk, it is true, of God's powers, acts, and attributes, but these discriminations are only 'virtual', and made from the human point of view. In God

all these points of view fall into an absolute identity of being. ... Furthermore, He is *im-mense, boundless* [infinite, *ananta*]; for could He be outlined in space, He would be composite, and this would contradict his indivisibility. He is therefore *omnipresent*, indivisibly there, at every point of space. He is similarly wholly present at every point of time,—in other words *eternal*.⁹

A strong ideological system is one where one characteristic logically proceeds from another. Its internal order necessarily follows from its first principles and basic presuppositions, from which further principles may be generated or deduced.¹⁰ As mentioned earlier, Acharya Shankara implies that simplicity and non-duality is related to immutability; Swamiji to timeless eternity, *aseity*, infinity, and indestructibility; Aquinas to incorporeality and *aseity*; and James to infinity, omnipresence, and being eternal. Spatial simplicity implies Brahman-God is incorporeal without a body that has parts. While a simple being is incorporeal, it is not always the case that an incorporeal entity is simple. For example, thought is considered to be incorporeal yet it has conceptual divisions and is not simple.

Comments on Divine Simplicity

In itself, *nirguna* Brahman has no qualities or attributes. It is beyond every form of duality, including space, time, causality, thought, and words, being 'totally other' from the dualistic—pluralistic—world of the senses and intellect. Viewed from the standpoint of the human intellect, it can be conceived of as having five intrinsic characteristics: simplicity—non-duality, *aseity*—self-existent, immutability, timeless eternity, and infinity without parts—Being, what Brahman-God is. In itself, there is no difference between one of these five characteristics and the

other four. The attributes are relatively, but not absolutely, distinct.

At this ontological level, Brahman-God does not possess the extrinsic attributes of omnipresence, omnipotence, omniscience, and omnibenevolence—becoming, what Brahman-God does. This is because there is nothing separate from Brahman-God to be present at, to have power over, to know, or be good towards. The extrinsic attributes require the existence of space, time, and causality.

The intrinsic characteristics of Brahman-God are described as being absolute—Brahman-God in itself, immanent—indwelling, intransitive—characteristics remaining within Brahman-God, and incommunicable—not shared with others. This is in contrast with extrinsic operational attributes that are characterised as relative—Brahman-God in relation to the world, immanent—external, transitive—attributes that proceed from Brahman-God such as love, and communicable—shared with others to a limited degree.¹¹ They apply to the Divine as *saguna* Brahman—personal God in relation to the universe and to humans.

Simplicity—non-duality—is the fundamental attribute that is necessary for the other four. For example, being internally simple—intra-non-dual—without spatial, temporal, or conceptual parts or divisions implies both immutability and timeless eternity. Being temporally simple means that Brahman-God cannot be divided into temporal units that are required for change to occur. Without moments of time, there can be neither physical change nor conceptual change, in substance, quality, quantity, relation, or activity. Without temporal parts, it possesses no unactualised potentiality. Just as Brahman-God has no bodily parts and cannot change spatially, since it is wholly present everywhere; so too it has no temporal

parts and cannot change temporarily, since it is wholly present every-when. In addition, Brahman-God is eternally timeless since there are no units of time and being substantially simple—not composed of parts. It cannot be corruptible or disintegrate and become non-eternal. If space—infinity, time—immutability and eternity, and causation—*aseity*—exist at this level, they are without parts or division—simplicity. These five attributes are sometimes described ‘by negation’, since they are not found in the phenomenal world.

External simplicity—inter-non-dual—indicates that Brahman-God is not a part of something else. It is all-encompassing infinite, ‘all in all’, not an object separate from other objects. This characteristic implies infinity because there is nothing outside of it to limit it, *aseity*, since there is nothing separate from Brahman-God to cause or influence it, and that it is one in number,

because it alone exists. Since there is nothing internally or externally imperfect to influence it, it always remains perfect.

Being conceptually simple, in mental and physical space, means that at the level of divine simplicity Brahman-God is not a composition of absolute-relative, agreement-disagreement, being-becoming, cause-effect, concrete-abstract, continuous-discrete, essence-existence, eternal-temporal, extension-thought, freedom-determinism, genus-species, independence-dependence, infinite-finite, integration-disintegration, internal-external, matter-energy, matter-form, mind-matter, name-form, necessary-contingent, one-many, potential-actual, primary-secondary, rest-motion, similarity-difference, static-dynamic, subject-object, subject-predicate, substance-attribute, subtle-gross, unity-diversity, universal-particular or whole-part, and so on.

Thomas Aquinas



IMAGE: [HTTP://LIGHTOFTRUTH.IN](http://lightoftruth.in)

Brahman-God is Identical with its Attributes

Divine simplicity teaches:

There is also no real distinction between God as subject of his attributes and his attributes. God is thus in some sense *identical* to each of his attributes, which implies that each attribute is identical to every other one. God is omniscient, then, not in virtue of instantiating or exemplifying omniscience—which would imply a real distinction between God and the property of omniscience—but by *being* omniscience. And the same holds for each of the divine omni-attributes.¹²

Thus, Brahman-God is self-existent—*aseity*—because at the simplicity—non-dual—ontological level, it is identical and one and the same with its perfect personality, principles, powers, properties, places—*lokas*, realms, and performances of actions. It is identical with all that is perfect, the transcendental Vedas which are the

Plato



eternal truths, knowledge—rationality, goodness, moral law, platonic ideas, and the divinity within, in addition to existence, *sat*; consciousness-intelligence, *chit*; and bliss, *ananda*. In fact, samadhi and the Buddhist nirvana are Brahman-God in another form. Swamiji noted: ‘By the Vedas no books are meant. They mean the accumulated treasury of spiritual laws discovered by different persons in different times.’¹³ These are the transcendental eternal truths, the source of the higher aspects of the religious scriptures of the world. Each of these divine attributes is a different manifestation and facet of the One Brahman-God. As omniscient Brahman-God is the known, object; knower, subject; and knowing, action; in their perfect state. In the realm of simplicity, they are all one. Brahman-God is power, knowledge, and goodness and the active manifestation of these. They are a single entity Brahman-God specified in different ways. As a unifying factor, one possibility is that all of these characteristics mentioned in this paragraph are various aspects of the mind of Brahman-God.

To give two examples of a non-personal view of divine attributes: Plato (427–347 BCE) conceived of the forms-ideas, *eidos*, such as justice, beauty, and goodness as separate from God, yet having the divine qualities of being eternal, unchanging, indestructible, perfect, spaceless, timeless, and existing in a transcendental realm. The Hindu Purva-Mimamsa religious philosophy systematised by Kumarila (620/50–680/700) apprehends the Divine not as a personal God, but as eternal and authorless religious scripture, the Sanskrit Vedas. But we must remember that religious scriptures are only one of the aspects of the Divine. From the Hindu standpoint, the transcendental Vedas are a form of Brahman-God.

For most people, it is easy to worship God as a person, but this might not appeal to a scientist

or a philosopher. If an atheist or agnostic does not like the idea of a Personal God they can think of this omnipotent and omniscient power as the first cause, ultimate reality, or the source of existence including their own. This source is far greater than we are, having maximum power and knowledge. Through meditation we can make some contact with this power that will transform us. For example, while Albert Einstein rejected a Personal God, he referred to his belief system as 'cosmic religion'. He recognised a 'miraculous order which manifests itself in all of nature as well as in the world of ideas'. He believed a cosmic religion is necessary for science: 'I have nothing but awe when I observe the laws of nature. There are not laws without a lawgiver, but how does this lawgiver look? Certainly not like a man magnified.'¹⁴

According to Aquinas, God is identical with his attributes. Possibly a less stringent definition of simplicity is supplied by the Bengal Vaishnava Jiva Goswami (c. 1511–96) that Brahman-God's essential inherent attributes are internal aspects of the Divine substance. God's form is identical with God's essence. These attributes are infinite and immutable, not subject to origination, preservation, or destruction. The relation between God's substance and the essential attribute of power, Shakti, is so intimate, that one cannot be conceived of without the other. It is like the relationship between the substratum of fire and its manifestation as the power to burn. They are ontologically inseparable, but logically distinguishable from each another.¹⁵

The following point was made by Augustine (c. 354–430):

God is not great by a greatness, which is not that which He Himself is, so that God becomes as it were a sharer in it when He is great. For in that case the greatness would be greater than God, but there cannot be anything greater than

God; therefore, He is great by that greatness which is identical with Himself ... He Himself is His own greatness. Let the same also be said of the goodness, the eternity, the omnipotence of God, in fact in all of the attributes, which can be predicated of God when He is referred to as He is in Himself.¹⁶

Implying Brahman-God does not receive its goodness, power, or knowledge from anything else.

Anselm (1033–1109), the Archbishop of Canterbury, realised: 'A just human being is not understood as *being* his justice, but as *having* his justice. By contrast, it is not properly said that the supreme nature [God] *has* its justice, but *is* its justice. Hence when the supreme nature is called just, it is properly understood as *being* its justice, rather than as *having* its justice.'¹⁷ When a human being participates in justice, the result is an imperfect copy of the original.

Thomas Aquinas explains that God and his attributes are one and the same:

In every simple thing, Its being [existence] and that which It is [essence, attributes] are the same. For if the one were not the other, simplicity would be removed. As we have shown, however, God is absolutely simple. Hence, in God, being good is not anything distinct from Him; He is His goodness.¹⁸

Eternity is nothing else but God Himself.¹⁹

The truth of the Divine Intellect is God Himself (1.16.7; 177).

It is God

whose essence alone is His being, in Whom there are no accidents, since whatever belongs to another accidentally belongs to Him essentially (1.6.3; 54). In God being and essence are the same ... His essence or quiddity [whatness] is not something other than His being. Or it has been shown above that there is some being that must be through Itself, and this is God. God's being is His essence. Therefore, God's understanding is His intellect.²⁰

According to the Bengal Vaishnavite, Baladeva Vidyabhushana (c. 1700–93), following the presentation of Jadunath Sinha,

God's form or Personality is not different from His Essence. God is of the Essence of knowledge, powers, and lordship. Divine Personality is identical with the Essence of Existence-Knowledge-Bliss. His Essence also is not additional to, or different from His Personality. ... There is non-difference or identity between the Divine Attributes and the Divine Substance. We speak of difference between them, though there is identity between them, as we speak of the waves of water. There is no internal difference between Divine Personality and Divine Essence, and between Divine Essence and Divine attributes.²¹

All of the Divine attributes are without internal difference and are identical with His essence.

Baladeva Vidyabhushana



This integral unity corresponds to the inseparable relationship between a substance and its attributes (95–6).

Not considering *nirguna* Brahman, nothing exists apart from *saguna* Brahman-God to bring it into existence—*aseity*. It does not depend on something other than itself to be what it is. It is neither limited by, nor determined in any way by, anything other than itself. At the divine level, it alone exists and there is nothing else to limit, control, or work on it. This means every mode of being—power, knowledge, goodness—is ultimately dependent upon Brahman-God and not vice versa. It is the source of existence, with the power of bestowing it or withdrawing it from all beings.

The self-caused one derives its being and perfection from its own internal nature and not from any entity external to it. As self-existent, Brahman-God is the ground and cause of its own existence. Because Brahman-God is not created or dependent on anything, it is not composed of anything more basic than itself. Conversely, humans exhibit a dualistic subject-predicate structure, a property combined with the person that bears it. They participate in power, knowledge, goodness, and so on, that are separate from themselves. Moreover, Brahman-God's thoughts are not just a reflection of how external things are in themselves, because it is not dependent upon created reality in any way. On the contrary, created reality is dependent upon its thoughts.

If *saguna* Brahman—Personal God and the moral law are considered to be two separate entities, then all of Brahman-God's activities and ideas concerning morality would be determined by an external source. This is a violation of the principle of divine *aseity*, being that an independent Brahman-God cannot be influenced by anything else. Brahman-God would not be

what it is through itself *per se* but through another, *per aliud*. This is to deny its sovereignty over all things. In fact, in the realm of ethics, Brahman-God, the supreme Being, would be subservient to the moral law, whose dictates it is obliged to obey. So it is best to realise that they are not separate and that Brahman is morality itself. Brahman-God did not invent moral truths nor is it bound by them as an external source; they reflect the divine nature that is necessarily good. All value is grounded in the divine nature. All other things are good to the extent they partake of Brahman-God's intrinsic moral nature.²²

Considering Brahman-God and goodness to be two separate entities results in the following dilemma. The question arises: 'Is the good because God wills it, as divine command theories teach, or does God will it because it is good?' In support of the former, the German Isaac Dorner (1809–84) believed that goodness is not derived from its own essence or inherent nature, but from the will and power of God. As Eleonore Stump points out, the problem is that this makes goodness arbitrary since God could have willed some other good or in the future might change the present definition of goodness. In contrast, the latter view implies that God has no choice and is constrained by an external goodness to will as it does.²³ This dilemma is avoided if Brahman-God and perfect goodness are identical, one Reality looked upon from two different standpoints.

Divine simplicity means there is no metaphysical distinction between Brahman-God and its attributes—qualities. There is a necessary identity; Brahman-God is its intelligence and power that are dynamic, not abstract entities. If intelligence and power were separate from it, then the divine nature would depend upon the existence of something other than itself,

which violates divine *aseity*. Infinite Brahman-God would participate in the attributes of intelligence and power, which would be greater and broader than itself and it would be limited by other entities. If knowledge, power, goodness, and so on, are something apart from Brahman-God, then if these properties did not exist, Brahman-God could not be omniscient, omnipotent, or omnibenevolent. Intelligence and power would be prior to Brahman-God, which then would not be the first cause. Its understanding and power would be subject to change, progressing from a state of potentiality to actuality. If the law of non-contradiction were separate from Brahman-God, then it would be subservient to a foreign entity and not be all-powerful or supreme.²⁴

Brahman-God constitutes an ontological domain of the highest order that is the ultimate source of all forms of existence. *Jivas*, souls, who participate in this realm are obviously subordinate to it. In order to exist and be individuated, they possess properties of power and knowledge by a limited participation, *ens per participationem*, in being. Vedantins sometimes use the phrase 'borrow from' and the Christian Platonists 'participate in'. Brahman-God does not exist because it participates in the realm of being but, rather, because it is Being itself. Everything is through another except for Brahman-God that acts through itself. The changeless and eternal Brahman-God is the exemplary cause of the phenomenal world, having inherent physical, knowledgeable, and moral causal power.²⁵ It is the first being through its essence, *ens per essentiam*, and no attribute or quality exists prior to it for it to participate in. If it participated in an attribute, it would be a supplementary quality added to its infinite being. Nothing can be added to or subtracted from it. By analogy, fire is hot by its nature, while water becomes hot by

participating in the fire's heat.²⁶ Brahman could not be self-existent if it attained knowledge, power, goodness, and so on, from a source separate from itself.

Both *creatio ex nihilo*, creation out of nothing, and *creatio ex deo*, creation out of the being of God, reject *creatio ex materia*, creation out of pre-existent external materials. In other words, Brahman-God does not create the world out of pre-existing external power, knowledge, goodness, ideas, laws, and so on. Either they are identical with Brahman-God or are created out of nothing.

Most religious philosophical thinkers believe that an omnipotent Brahman-God cannot violate the law of non-contradiction. For example, it cannot create a being superior to itself, produce a five-sided triangle on a two dimensional surface. But the law of non-contradiction and of reason are not something apart from Brahman-God that limit its activities. They are Brahman-God itself, which is one with its own internal nature. In Brahman-God there is no subject-attribute distinction as there is for humans.

Jesus Christ says: 'I am ... the truth' not I am truthful.²⁷ On the other hand, if Brahman-God created all things such as power, knowledge, goodness, and so on, then what would its nature be prior to bringing them into existence? It would have to be something different from them. Nor could it ever be known since all forms of knowledge are something created that comes later. Conversely, the fact that Brahman-God is power, knowledge, and goodness in their highest respect implies it is analogically knowable.

Plotinus's (c. 205–70) Intellectual Principle can be divided into *nous*, the divine intellect and knower, and *noeta*, the divine world and known. Thought, subject, and being, object, form a unified single reality. *Nous* and *noeta* are identical,

they are one differing only as a logical, not an actual distinction.²⁸ From this standpoint, Brahman-God is the *brahmaloka*, kingdom of God itself, and not something separate from it.

As phenomenal beings, we participate in or borrow from the realms of knowledge and power that are separate from us. Yet whatever knowledge or power we possess in our immediate experience is what we consider to be our phenomenal self. David Hume (1711–76), possibly indirectly under Indian Buddhist influence, taught that we are a bundle or collection of distinct perceptions—ideas and impressions—that rapidly succeed one another without an underlying permanent, unitary, independent self. Being always in a state of flux, there is no constant and unchanging entity we call the self. We consider ourselves to be our thoughts, feelings, and perceptions.²⁹

Can a simple Brahman perform freewill activity? Since will and a choice made between two different entities involve plurality, one would answer no. Yet if God exists in a timeless realm that is simple and can determine events in a world of time that is complex as Aquinas thought, then a simple Brahman makes free decisions but certainly not in the way humans do. Whether all of this is possible requires a great deal of thought.

Attribute-Attribute, Quality-Quality, Property-Property, Simplicity

The traditional doctrine of simplicity teaches that all of Brahman-God's essential attributes are identical with each other, for instance, immutability with infinity, goodness with omnipresence. Since this aspect of simplicity is denied by common sense, many contemporary Western religious writers reject this idea. They wonder why this idea was not challenged in the past, and assume traditional writers held different premises and had a different way of thinking than we do now.

Rejection of this idea might be a mistake because the attribute of simplicity occurs at an ontological level of being, where divine intelligence exists without conceptual division. Simplicity is a divine attribute that is incommunicable, not shared with humans. This ontological stage precedes the human intellect and senses that require division, and therefore are not logically compatible with simplicity.³⁰ In the next stage of involution, simplicity becomes complexity. Aquinas gives us an example of where the human intellect is not compatible with the higher Reality: 'Creatures are really related to God Himself; whereas in God there is no real relation to creatures, but a relation only in idea.'³¹ The 'relation only in idea' is the human intellect's

attempt to understand an event that is not 'real' at a higher ontological level. Also according to Aquinas, God exists in a timeless realm that is simple and determines events in a world of time that is complex. In this case, God's attributes would be identical in the former realm and separate in the latter.

If at the ontological level of simplicity, unity, and oneness, there is no difference between one divine attribute and another, then there is also no difference between one thing and another. That all divine attributes are identical occurs at the penultimate level of simplicity. The highest ontological level of simplicity is a state of Oneness, where there is no difference between divine attributes and anything else. In this state,

School of Athens: Plato (centre left) and Aristotle Surrounded by Philosophers



PAINTING: FRESCO / RAPHAEL (1508-11) / STANZA DELLA SEGNATURA, VATICAN

all forms of knowledge like religion, philosophy, physical, behavioural, and social sciences, and so on, would be indistinguishable. In this state, everything is identical with everything else in an undifferentiated unity.

Only at the next ontological level in the descending series of involution, through a process of conceptual division do these differentiations come into existence. In the conceptual space through the *principium individuationis*, principle of individuation, the divine attributes become separate entities, each with a different mental form. Operating within the boundaries of spiritual and physical space and time, Brahman-God becomes omnipresent, omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent interacting with other entities.

If Brahman-God is simple, its nature is not caused by anything else, *aseity*, and therefore its attributes are necessary, they are essential properties that cannot be different from what they are. These are necessary characteristics of Brahman-God that have always existed and cannot cease to exist, unlike accidents, not essential to a thing's nature, or contingent properties, dependent on something else. Necessary being involves both necessary existence, thatness, and a necessary nature, whatness, meaning Brahman could not differ from what it is.

Brahman-God has its attributes essentially because it is identical with its attributes that are not caused by another source.³² At our level, the divine Intellect now has conceptual divisions and the various areas of knowledge become distinguishable. Not only is religion separate from other areas of study, religion subdivides into particular religions. Swamiji stated: 'There never was my religion or yours, my national religion or your national religion; there never existed many religions, there is only the one. One Infinite religion existed through all

eternity and will ever exist, and this religion is expressing itself in various countries in various ways.'³³

At a lower ontological level, the eternal transcendental attributes of Brahman-God as archetypes transform into ectypes that are the phenomenal world. The ectypes are imperfect copies of the perfect divine originals, which includes the omni-attributes, to various degrees. Through a descending process of division and fragmentation following an involutionary process, at each lower ontological level there is less and less structural organisation until a state of chaos is finally reached. Fortunately, all of the ontological levels or realms always exist at every moment of time, during the past, present, and future; unlike chronological events that began or ceased x number of years ago. For this reason, a very advanced yogi mystic can make contact with these higher realms at this very moment. It is like our gross physical body and subtle mental body, though differing in nature, coexist at the same time. Though our particular universe has a beginning, the phenomenal world is pre- and post-eternal.

According to the Neo-Platonic Realism creation theory of Johannes Scotus Erigena (c. 810–77), the universal, the class-concept or logical genus, is the original reality. It produces from itself and contains within itself the particulars, the species, and ultimately the individual. For him, logical relations of concepts are also metaphysical relations. The universals are determining substances that through logical subordination become production and inclusion of the particular by the general. Logical partition and determination transform into a causal process by means of which the universal takes on form and unfolds itself in the particulars. Deity, the most universal Being, produces out of itself all things. Following this system of logical pantheism, God

developed into the particulars, proceeding out of God to take on a definite form. The unfolding process proceeds in the graded scale of logical universality.³⁴

While Erigena presents a creation that follows the laws of logic, Swamiji prefers an epistemological creation through the intellect and senses.

The Absolute and the Infinite can become this universe only by limitation. Everything must be limited that comes through the senses, or through the mind, or through the intellect.³⁵

This Absolute (a) has become the universe (b) by coming through time, space, and causation (c). This is the central idea of Advaita. Time, space, and causation are like the glass through which the Absolute is seen, and when It is seen on the lower side, It appears as the universe. Now we at once gather from this that in the Absolute there is neither time, space, nor causation. The idea of time cannot be there, seeing that there is no mind, no thought. The idea of space cannot be there, seeing that there is no external change. What you call motion and causation cannot exist where there is only One (130).

Whatever we do is always through Him. Now the question is: What are time, space, and causation? Advaita means non-duality; there are not two, but one. Yet we see that here is a proposition that the Absolute is manifesting Itself as many, through the veil of time, space, and causation (135).

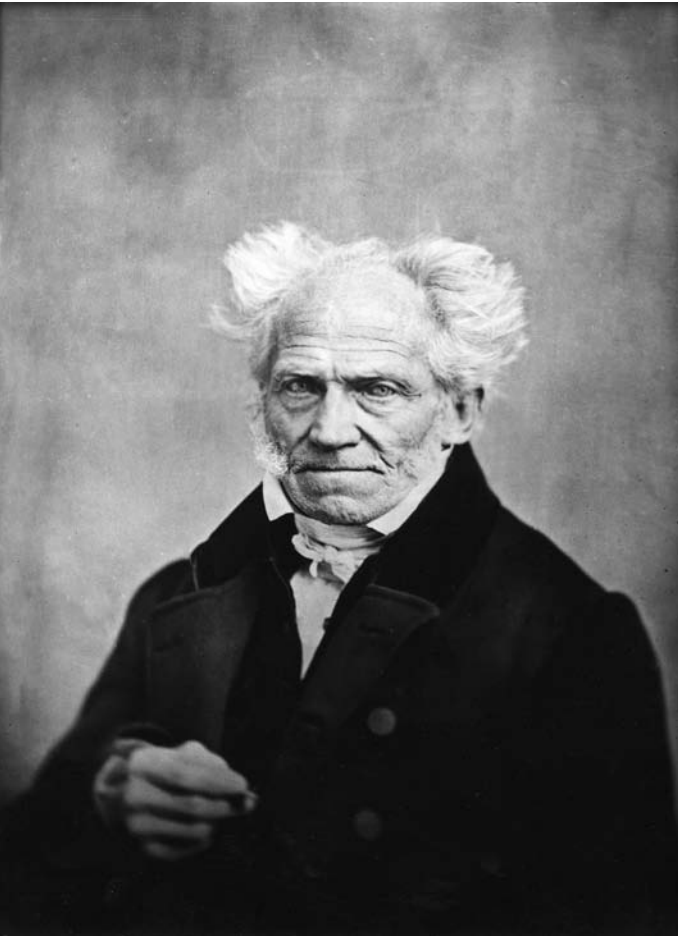
Unity is before creation, diversity is creation (4.372).

What the Hindu and Judeo-Christian religious theists refer to as the attributes of Brahman-God are

in some ways comparable to Plato's Ideas, eternal forms, and archetypes of which all things are copies to varying degrees. Divine attributes and Platonic Ideas are both unchanging, timelessly eternal, undivided, uncaused, and perfect; transcendent to our own world, existing beyond space and time. Concerning Platonic Ideas, Arthur Schopenhauer (1788–1860) taught that the Ideas are 'expressed in innumerable individuals, exist as the unattained patterns of these, or as the eternal forms of things. Not themselves entering into time and space, the medium of individuals, they remain fixed, subject to no change. ... These

Avicenna's Portrait on Silver Vase





Arthur Schopenhauer

grades are certainly related to individual things as their eternal forms, or as their prototypes.³⁶

They are

the original unchanging forms and properties of all natural bodies, whether organic or inorganic, as well as the universal forces that reveal themselves according to natural laws. Therefore these Ideas as a whole present themselves in innumerable individuals and in isolated details, and are related to them as the archetype is to its copies (169). ...

The eternal Ideas, the original forms of all things, can be described as truly existing, since they *always are but never become and never pass away*. No plurality belongs to them; for each by

its nature is only one, since it is the archetype itself, of which all the particular, transitory things of the same kind and name are copies or shadows. Also *no coming into existence and no passing away* belong to them, for they are truly being or existing, but are never becoming or vanishing like their fleeting copies (171).



Notes and References

1. Concerning *saguna* Brahman-Personal God 'it' implies he, she, and without gender.
2. Shankara, *Crest-Jewel of Discrimination* (Viveka-Chudamani), trans. Swami Prabhavananda (Hollywood, CA: Vedanta, 1947), 469; 129.
3. See S Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy*, 2 vols (Delhi: Oxford University, 2009), 2.534–5.
4. Śrī Śaṅkarācārya, *Brahma-Sūtra Bhāṣya*, trans. Swami Gambhirananda (Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 2006), 2.1.27; 356.
5. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 9 vols (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1–8, 1989; 9, 1997), 2.234.
6. St Thomas Aquinas, *Basic Writings of Saint Thomas Aquinas*, trans. Anton Pegis, 2 vols (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997), 1.3.7; 34.
7. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, trans. Anton Pegis (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1975), 1.18.8.
8. *Basic Writings of Saint Thomas Aquinas*, 1.18.4; 193.
9. William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (London: Longmans Green, 1913), 439–40.
10. A classic example is Spinoza's *Ethics*, which follows a logical geometrical order. To prove the interconnectedness of his system of ideas he begins with parts, definitions, axioms, most important propositions, notes and appendixes, and later adds on prefaces, corollaries, lemmas, and postulates.
11. See L Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm B Eerdmans, 1996), 55–6.
12. 'Divine Simplicity', *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* <<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/divine-simplicity/>> accessed 11 June 2019.
13. *Complete Works*, 1.6–7.
14. William Hermanns and Albert Einstein, *Einstein and the Poet: In Search of the Cosmic Man*

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15. See Sudhindra Chandra Chakravarti, *Philosophical Foundation of Bengal Vaiṣṇavism: A Critical Exposition* (Calcutta: Academic, 1969), 64–5.
 16. Saint Augustine, *The Trinity*, trans. Stephen McKenna (Washington DC: The Catholic University of America, 2002), 188–9.
 17. Anselm, *Monologion*, Chapter 16. Also See Saint Anselm (Archbishop of Canterbury), *Anselm of Canterbury: Monologion, Proslogion, Debate with Gaunilo, and Meditation on Human Redemption* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 1974), 24–5.
 18. *Summa Contra Gentiles*, 1.38.
 19. *Basic Writings of Saint Thomas Aquinas*, 1.10.2; 77.
 20. *Summa Contra Gentiles*, 1.22, 45.
 21. Jadunath Sinha, *The Philosophy and Religion of Chaitanya and His Followers* (Calcutta: Jadunath Sinha Foundation, 1976), 95.
 22. See Daniel Dombrowski, 'Objective Morality and Perfect Being Theology: Three Views', *American Journal of Theology and Philosophy*, 29/2 (May 2008), 205–13.
 23. See Eleonore Stump, 'Simplicity', in *A Companion to Philosophy of Religion*, eds. Charles Taliaferro, Paul Draper, and Philip Quinn (West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 270–7; Also see Robert F Brown, 'Schelling and Dörner on Divine Immutability', *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 53/2 (June 1985), 246.
 24. See T Morris and C Menzel, 'Absolute Creation', *American Philosophical Quarterly* 23/4 (October 1986), 353–62. This article discusses some of these topics but arrives at different conclusions.
 25. See F Gerrit Immink, 'The Simplicity of God' in *Understanding the Attributes of God*, eds. G van den Brink and M Sarot (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1999), 103–4, 109–12, 115–7.
 26. See *Basic Writings of Saint Thomas Aquinas*, 1.3.4; 30, 1.44.1; 426 and *Summa Contra Gentiles*, 1.22; 2.8.
 27. John 14:6.
 28. Philippus Pistorius, *Plotinus and Neoplatonism* (Cambridge: Bowes and Bowes, 1952), 27–35.
 29. Two philosophers from the British Isles, the Irish Protestant Bishop George Berkeley (1685–1753) and David Hume (1711–76) became famous for teaching ideas that to some extent were known to the Indian Buddhist and Charvaka philosophers more than a thousand years earlier. They were Berkeley's Subjective Idealism (Yogachara-Vijñānavāda Buddhism), and Hume's Non-Self (Buddhist Anatta, Nagasena fl. 150 BCE) and the idea that there is no necessary relation between cause and effect (Indian Charvaka, later taught by the Islamic al-Ghazali). In addition, John Locke's (1632–1704) Representative Realism bears some resemblance to that of the Indian Sautrantika Buddhism. It is not known if these ideas existed in abbreviated oral form in Western Europe at that time, originating from the contemporary Jesuit and Franciscan studies of Asian Buddhism. Two articles have come out proving the possibility that Hume, and possibly Berkeley, had some knowledge of these Buddhist ideas that originated in India. See Nolan Jacobson, 'The Possibility of Oriental Influence in Hume's Philosophy', in Alexander Macfie, *Eastern Influence on Western Philosophy* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University, 2003), 110–29; Also see Alison Gopnik, 'Could David Hume Have Known about Buddhism?' *Hume Studies*, 35/1 and 2 (2009), 5–28; Gopal Stavig, 'Congruencies Between Indian and Islamic Philosophy', *Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute*, 81/1/4 (2000), 213–26. Many of David Hume's reasons in opposition to the Design Argument were stated seven hundred years earlier by Ramanuja according to C Mackenzie Brown, 'The Design Argument in Classical Hindu Thought', *International Journal of Hindu Studies*, 12/2 (August 2008), 105, 134–7.
 30. See 'Divine Simplicity', *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy* <www.iep.utm.edu/div-simp/> accessed 11 June 2019.
 31. See *Basic Writings of Saint Thomas Aquinas*, 1.13.7; 122.
 32. See 'Divine Simplicity', *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.
 33. *Complete Works*, 4.180.
 34. See W Windelband, *A History of Philosophy* (New York: Macmillan, 1926), 289–90.
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YOUNG EYES

How Should be the Married Life of Parents?

IT IS COMMON to think that children have no idea about marriages and that they have nothing to say about them. Most people think that children's opinions on marriages do not matter. But, children see marriages from close quarters and are often the most affected or benefited from a marriage. Hence, the perspectives of we children on marriages are quite important and it would do well for married couples to hear what we have to say.

First and foremost, no relationship works if there is no closeness between the couple. Why do not adults spend time and share their lives completely with the person they love and with whom they have decided to spend their lives? This is what we children fail to understand. There is hardly any time spent together. Whatever time is spent together also is hijacked by the television, smartphones, or the computer. Or it is spent in watching movies or dining in a restaurant. Why do adults do not spend enough time just talking and interacting with their spouses?

Quarrels and blame-games do not bring any happiness to anyone. Why are adults always keen on blaming their spouses for whatever goes wrong in their lives? Instead of seeking love and comfort in the company of their spouses, they constantly play the blame-game. They take their spouse for granted, and they also take their families for granted. Children need a healthy, peaceful, and happy family. Constant bickering and quarrelling affects the psychological development of a child and creates a deep trauma inside the child's mind. Somehow, adults think that marriage is a licence to quarrel

with, insult, and call names the spouse and the family, whereas in truth marriage is a journey that spouses undertake to have a better life with a great companion.

Most spouses do not spend enough time in understanding their partners. They fail to cultivate interest in the interests of their spouses. Sometimes, the quarrel could be about something as simple or even silly as about one spouse wanting to watch a basketball game while the other wanting to watch a cricket match. Aligning one's interests with those of one's spouse to the greatest extent possible and to also increase this possibility is one of the most important things necessary for a marriage.

For a marriage to work, the most important thing to be kept in mind is that the family should be given the ultimate importance. No outsider, personal interests, or any other issue should supersede the togetherness of the family. If there is a family commitment, both spouses should keep up the commitment. If there is a birthday party of your child, you need to attend it and not give it up because of a business meeting or some other thing at work. After all, you do all these things to keep your family happy, but if you cannot be with your family because of these activities, what is the point in doing all that?

Being together is the key to having a successful marriage. This togetherness will make one to want to be in a marriage and one would start liking the company of one's family. Most adults think that marriage brings boredom or monotony. This is not true. If you are with someone

and you care and love them, your life becomes quite easy to live, because you know that you have someone whom you can fall back on for support and understanding.

There is another thing that does not make any sense in adults' behaviour. They think that decent and courteous behaviour is only for strangers and acquaintances and that you do not need to be gentle and courteous with friends, relatives, and one's family. This is completely wrong. It is not right to yell at people you call your loved ones. If you do not behave in a manner that shows that you love someone, that you love your family, how would they know that you really love them? Taking your spouse and family for granted is a big mistake almost everyone does.

Getting to know their spouses is another thing that many people do not do. A human being constantly evolves, constantly changes and one's preferences, likes and dislikes, keep on changing throughout one's life. One should know what is happening in one's spouse's life, what is going on in one's children's lives. In short, a person should know and be involved in what is happening in one's family.

Marriage is something that is relaxing, fun, gives comfort, love, companionship, and solace. And then there are children. You can actually give shape to real human lives. That is really splendid. You leave a legacy in the form of your children. They carry your name and if you have spent quality time with your children and if you have inculcated good values in them, they would continue your beliefs and continue realising your dreams.

We children want to be involved in every aspect of the family. We totally understand that there are some things that only adults can understand and we cannot, but most things can be explained to us in a way that we understand them. We need to know what is happening

in the family because then we would be able to give more love, care, and comfort when it would be the most needed and to the parent who needs it the most. For instance, if a parent tells us about some problem at work in a way that we understand it, then we can comfort that parent and do whatever we can to remove their tensions.

However, parents not only do not tell us their problems and concerns, but snub us away when we try to ask them questions about their bad mood, and sometimes they treat us as though we were unwanted and as though we were nobody in their lives. That hurts us more than it would hurt an adult. And though we are children, it is possible that we can give a perspective or an angle to a situation that would be quite new or innovative to our parents. We do not have all the worries of the parents, after all.

Speaking about worries, we do worry about our parents. Sometimes it feels that it is the parents who need guidance and training more than us children. Our parents are our models for love, relationships, family, and life. And it is important for us that they give us a good model to emulate. Our parents shape almost all of our opinions and beliefs and they need to be aware of it all the time. Then they would be more loving, caring, and more responsible.



BALABODHA

Ancient Wisdom Made Easy


Brahmana

THE WORD *brahmana* is a commonly used Sanskrit word. It is used by people, who do not even know Sanskrit, as it is present in almost every Indian language. The widely used meaning of the word *brahmana* is a person belonging to the social strata or caste of brahmanas. However, it is necessary to see the other meanings and the origins of this Sanskrit word. Sanskrit is a classical language like Greek, Latin, and Persian. And in Sanskrit, as in most classical languages, most words are derived from a stem or root.

The word *brahmana* is derived by adding the Sanskrit suffix *an* to the word *brahman*, which means the four-headed first deity of the Hindu triad of gods and the operative creator of the world, a brahmana, the superintending or presiding priest at the sacrifice, one of the astronomical yogas, one of the principal servants of the Jinas, the divine cause and essence of the world from which all created things are supposed to emanate and to which they return, the unknown God, the practice of austere devotion, the Vedas or scriptures, holy knowledge, the supreme impersonal attributeless Being, the efficient and material cause of the universe, the all-pervading soul and spirit of the universe, the essence from which all created things are produced and into which they are absorbed, a hymn of praise, a sacred text, the sacred and mystic syllable Om, the priestly of the brahmanical class, the power or energy of a brahmana, religious penance or austerities, celibacy, chastity, final emancipation

or beatitude, theology, religious knowledge, the Brahmana portion of the Vedas, wealth, food, truth, the soul, a devout person, one of the four *ritvijas* or priests employed at a Soma sacrifice, the sun, intellect, an epithet of the seven Prajapatis, an epithet of Brihaspati, the planet Jupiter, the world of Brahma, of Lord Shiva, a horse, one who has touched the several parts of one's body by the repetition of mantras, respectful salutation with folded hands while repeating the Veda, and obeisance to a preceptor.

The word *brahmana* means a person belonging to the caste of brahmana, an assemblage of brahmanas, a portion of the Vedas, the wife of a brahmana, a kind of wasp, a small ant, a potherb, a shrub, a kind of grass, belonging to a brahmana, befitting a brahmana, given by a brahmana, relating to religious worship, one who knows the four-headed god Brahma, a priest, theologian, an epithet of the fire-god Agni, name of the twenty-eighth astrological star or nakshatra, and the Soma vessel of a priest.

A person is considered a *brahmana* or a brahmin belonging to the first caste or varna not by birth or descent, though that is what is held to be the criterion by society, but by one's qualities and actions as explained by Sri Krishna in the Bhagavadgita. We find evidence of this principle even in the story of Satyakama Jabala in the *Chhandogya Upanishad*, who is considered a brahmana by his prospective guru though he did not know his lineage, mainly because Satyakama Jabala could tell an unpleasant truth about his descent without any hesitation. 

TRADITIONAL TALES

The Faith that Brought a Miracle

TWO PERSONS were travelling from village to village. One of them was a bit old. The other person was younger. Both were steeped in devotion to God. Both of them were moving from one place to the other singing wonderful devotional songs. The older person sang keeping the tempo by clapping his hands. The younger person was singing playing his tanpura. They had a music that could melt even a stone. Their songs melted the hearts of the listeners. Hearing the songs of these great devotees, other devotees became ecstatic. Even the hearts of sinners were purified. These two were wonderful singers.

Who were these two persons, who showed the way to God to thousands of people? What was the relationship between them? Were they great from their very birth? Or were they father and son singing all their way? No, neither of that is true. Then, who were they?

1

It was the time of Mughal rule in India. Jahan-gir was ruling India. In a village falling under his domain, lived a boy named Mauji. Mauji's parents were not alive. They died long before he crossed infancy. He did not know who named him 'Mauji'. He somehow ended up with that name. Everyone in the village called him by that name. He was an orphan.

Mauji was totally uninterested in studies. No one told him: 'Go to school and study.' He also did not think that he needed to go to school. He did not know whether going to school was a necessity. Hence, he did not ask anyone to send

him to school. He lived on the food provided to him by the village people. He did not have any permanent home. He used to lie in the porch of any house that was locked. Else, he would lie in any unclaimed, broken, dilapidated house. Mauji always spoke his mind; he did not know how to be otherwise. His was a pure and innocent heart, free from all deceit and vice.

2

There lived a landlord in that village. Mauji used to graze the landlord's cows. The landlord paid Mauji two rupees every month as a remuneration for his services. The landlord had also made arrangements for simple food and clothing for Mauji. Thus moved Mauji's wheel of life in that village.

Mauji was a loner. Since he did not have any education, he did not also have any connection with the wise. Since he was a boy, he did not possess worldly experience. Hence, on many occasions, he was cheated because of believing a lie to be true and a truth to be a lie. If he felt that something was right, he would follow it without fail and with great perseverance. In short, Mauji's thoughts were free from any bindings.

3

Even though these were Mauji's circumstances, he also had a great quality. That was the quality of speaking the truth irrespective of the circumstances. One day, as usual, Mauji went by the riverside, grazing the cows. Letting the cows graze, he sat in relaxation under a tree by the riverside. The cows were grazing at a distance. He was singing some random songs to himself,

all the while keeping an eye on the cows. Time was slipping by.

At that time, someone came by that place. As soon as Mauji looked at the person, he understood that it was some unknown brahmana from some place outside the village. The stranger had a bright and big mark on his forehead. On his shoulder was a small cloth-bag. Tired because of walking in the sun, the stranger too sat under the tree, under which Mauji was sitting, albeit at a distance. After resting awhile, the stranger got into the river and started bathing. Then, he wore a new dress that he took out from his bag. He sat by the bank of the river and closed his eyes. He held his nose with his right hand and sat there for some time without any movement in his body. Then he took something from his bag and ate it and appeased his hunger. That was it; he had finished all he had to do. The stranger got up to continue his journey.

Till then, Mauji was watching the activities of the stranger. He could gather that the stranger was leaving that place. Immediately, Mauji went and quickly approached the stranger: 'Sir, please

accept the salutations of this humble servant.' The stranger brahmana from outside the village blessed Mauji: 'Let God's grace be upon you.'

Mauji: 'Sir, who are you? Where are you coming from? Where are you going to?'

Brahmana: 'I am a scholar. I am coming from Keshavapura and I am going to Daulatabad. My disciples live there.'

Mauji: 'That is great. I have a small question. If you permit me, I want to ask you that question.'

Brahmana: 'What is your question? Please feel free to ask me.'

Mauji: 'What were you doing by holding your nose and closing your eyes for such a long time?'

Brahmana: 'Is this your question? I was then having the vision of God.'

Mauji: 'Oh! Is that so? That is great. I asked you that question only to know about this. Please excuse me for having interrupted your journey. You may please continue your journey.'

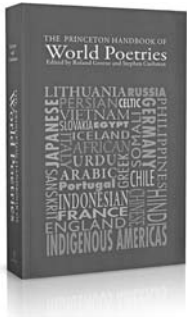
Mauji saluted that brahmana and bid him farewell.

(To be continued)



REVIEWS

For review in PRABUDDHA BHARATA,
publishers need to send **two** copies of their latest publications



The Princeton Handbook of World Poetries

Edited by Roland Greene and Stephen Cushman

Princeton University Press, 41 William Street, Princeton, New Jersey 08540. USA. Website: <https://press.princeton.edu>. 2017. 720 pp. \$35. PB. ISBN 9780691170510.

The creation of dictionaries is the need of the hour. Ronald Greene and Stephen Cushman have done the impossible by creating one of the best dictionaries in recent times. The book under review is one of its kind and has entries ranging from 'Newar Poetry' to the poetry of Ecuador. In recent times such a wide-ranging book has not been published within world poetries. Apart from accommodating lesser known poetries; this book is indispensable for having up-to-date bibliographies at the end of each entry. For instance, within the entry of the poetry of England, we have references to both offline critical texts and to functional websites (175). Terry Eagleton's *How to Read a Poem* (2007) is mentioned as well as weblinks given to the *Perdita Manuscripts*. The beauty of this handbook is that each entry is similarly well annotated. The entry on Hebrew poetry is a case in point. The misconception of Hebrew poetry being homogenous is erased and the definition of poetry by Barbara Herrnstein Smith's *Poetic Closure* (1968) is germane to all poetry written everywhere: 'As soon as we perceive that a verbal sequence has a sustained rhythm, that it is formally structured according to a continuously operating principle of organization ... we are in the presence of poetry' (249). This is found within the entry of Hebrew poetry which is not merely Biblical poetry as E Spichandler points out.

The book under review maps this 'verbal sequence' found all over the world. This includes

'digital poetry' (584), the antecedents of which are meticulously traced in the entry on the poetry of the United States: 'If the "little magazine" revolution of the 1960s was a poetry of the page in which typography and lineation represented expressive intent, the digital revolution of the 1990s and after inaugurated new forms of digital poetry ... [and] aleatory ... composition ... [including] Flarf' (ibid.).

The editors and contributors rightly understand that it is no longer possible to predict what turn poetry will take in every extant language in the world because the Internet has changed the creation and dissemination of poetry. Poetry is being read more than ever before because of the Internet and there can be no sense of an ending in our simulated world. The entries in this reprint, unlike the first print of this book in the late 1950s, are all therefore, open-ended. If the first edition of this book and the edition under review are read synoptically, then one knows the labour with which this edition has been updated. A Herculean task that nonetheless is the proper task of academic *littérateurs*.

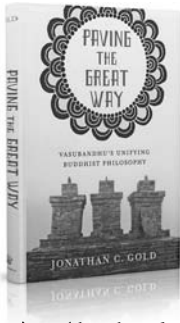
This book should be in literature departments and with every poetry lover. It is refreshing to find that jargon has not been used in this book. Poetry has been studied here without bombast and redundant reliance on other non-literary disciplines. To use Derek Attridge's phrase, *The Princeton Handbook of World Poetries* reasserts and reinstates 'the singularity of literature'. The translations of non-English poems within most entries are unexpected treats for the reader. This is how literature should be practised, and this *Handbook* is a strong rebuttal to those who are entangled with dumbed-down philosophy that goes by the name of literary theory within academic literary circles.

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Paving the Great Way: Vasubandhu's Unifying Buddhist Philosophy

Jonathan C Gold

Columbia University Press, 61 West 62 Street, New York, NY 10023, USA. Website: <https://cup.columbia.edu>. 2014. 336 pp. \$65. HB. ISBN 9780231168267.

This book states: 'This book is a study of the philosophical work of Vasubandhu, a fourth/fifth-century Indian monk who was perhaps the greatest Buddhist philosopher after the Buddha. Vasubandhu's works are well known in Indian, Tibetan, and East Asian Buddhist traditions. From his time to this day, and without a break, his writings have been widely cited and commented upon, his arguments used and debated, and his accomplishments praised. He is a familiar figure in contemporary Buddhist studies as well... Everyone knows Vasubandhu. What is remarkable, then, is that we do not, by now, know Vasubandhu very well' (1).

And after reading this book, we neither know Vasubandhu nor his works, forget about knowing either 'very well'. And the frivolity that is this book begins with the contradiction that Vasubandhu is admittedly stated as 'perhaps the greatest Buddhist philosopher after Buddha' and then in the same page, Jonathan C Gold goes on to term Nagarjuna, Asanga, Dignaga and Dharmakirti to be of 'comparable stature' to Vasubandhu.

Gold insults the Buddha, we are unsure which Buddha, as being a mere philosopher in the first paragraph of the book to ultimately compare the Buddha and Vasubandhu to Nietzsche and Freud (221). Is it not ironical that first this Princeton savant of Buddhism praises Vasubandhu as the greatest Buddhist philosopher above all others and then says that four other Buddhist thinkers are as good as Vasubandhu? Then to prove his non-existent domain-expertise in continental philosophy, Gold says in his first endnote that Vasubandhu was a 'fox' of Isaiah Berlin (249).

Within the context of the *Jatakas* and other Buddhist corpora, to even think of comparing Vasubandhu to a metaphorical fox shows, to put it mildly, a reprehensible lack of Eastern epistemology.

Vasubandhu anticipated Vachaspati Mishra, who is acknowledged to be a '*sarva-tantra-svatantra*; free from being influenced by different disciplines that one deals with'. That is, Mishra was a scholar with a mastery of every knowledge-domain he studied without becoming biased towards any one of those archaeologies of knowledge. These shows of faux scholarship, like comparing Vasubandhu to Berlin's 'fox', mar(k)s the book under review.

To illustrate this point further, one needs to closely read Gold's chapter 'Agency and the Ethics of Massively Cumulative Causality' (176–213). Like his first endnote, where Gold writes, 'I do not really believe', and yet he believes enough to write on what he disbelieves; this chapter is another effort at self-aggrandisement and contradictions, written in the first person and reminiscent of his fetish for heavy-sounding chapter titles that signify nothing.

The arrogant title of the first chapter should warn any scholar to stay away from this book: 'Summarizing Vasubandhu: Should a Buddhist Philosopher have a Philosophy?' (1–21). Gold is certainly none to summarise Vasubandhu's works and someone who does not understand what philosophy means, leave alone Buddhist philosophy, is not worth our time. Of course, Buddhism has a philosophy that is distinct from other philosophies. Sunyata or emptiness is an argument or standpoint, *vada*, which needs *pramana*, valid proof. Vasubandhu certainly had a particular world view that accommodated his own spiritual journey from being a Sautrantika to being a Yogachara Buddhist. These two *vidas*, found their greatest advocate in Vasubandhu, who provided their suitable *pramanas*.

Like all Eastern philosophies, Vasubandhu's works arose out of his experiences as a Buddhist monk. Thus, they need to be assessed by someone who is within this experiential Buddhist tradition. As will be shown shortly, Gold, being just a dry structuralist ivory-tower scholar, does not understand Vasubandhu at all. This, in spite of his linguistic and other academic credentials. Contrast this book under review with Malcolm Smith's translation in *Buddhahood in this Life: The Great Commentary by Vimalamitra* (Somerville, MA: Wisdom, 2016). Smith, though not teaching at Princeton, or, mayhap, because he is not teaching or learning there, has something original and constructive to

say in his translation. For the problematics and politics of Ivy League education and by extrapolation, professorial appointments, see Evan Gerstmann, 'The Irony of the Elite College Admissions Bribery Scandal', *Forbes*, 13 March 2019 <<https://tinyurl.com/y6d8zeom>> accessed 05 June 2019.

Now we turn to the narcissistic, hotchpotch, and hilarious chapter, 'Agency and the Ethics of Massively Cumulative Causality', to illustrate why Gold should not be read by anyone serious about Buddhism and Vasubandhu. The chapter begins thus: 'We are trapped, and destined to suffer, by the fact of our birth. Our suffering has, in fact, beginningless causes, and is properly conditioned to continue endlessly. What's more, the Buddhist denial of the personal self—ordinarily the seat of freedom—seems to deny as well the possibility of meaningful human agency. Vasubandhu, as we have seen, is repeatedly found denying agency—even agency in a single momentary event. Yet salvation is possible. It is proposed not through a new kind of agent, but through the very causal, karmic effects that have kept us imprisoned for so long. This chapter seeks to explain how this can work' (176).

Gold is incorrect in saying that Vasubandhu repeatedly denies agency and we are confused about which Buddhism is Gold speaking of when he says that Buddhism denies 'the personal self'? Dependent origination is not a denial of the personal self. Further, it is well understood within Buddhist Studies that the Buddha(s) spoke the same truth in different ways for different audiences. The *Lotus Sutra* and the *Lankavatara Sutra* are two distinct sutras meant for two distinct groups of subjects with agency. For without agency, these sutras, including Vasubandhu's religious practices qua texts, which arose out of Vasubandhu's agency, would be useless and impossible respectively. When these and other sutras, after being heard, are acted upon, only then do we have a Vasubandhu arising, the *pratityasamutpada* of Vasubandhu.

Thus, Gold is way off the mark when he accuses Vasubandhu of denying agency to the Buddhist subject. Gold's hubris as a non-Buddhist white man aspiring to teach Buddhism to the world is given away by his declaration that: 'For Buddhists, the kind of agency that is available to us sits very close to moral nihilism' (176). So Gold is not a Buddhist by his own

admission, and one wants to know who is this 'us' here? And exactly what 'kind of agency' is available to these elite us? Last this reviewer checked; even the Christian Martin Heidegger is not sure much agency is available to the being in the here and the now. It is now clear that Gold is seeking academic scores by making generalisations that mean nothing in particular. He is another Orientalist desperate for academic validation from his quid quo pro white peers. Gold writes of salvation. This is an idea not to be found in Eastern religions. Gold mixes categories that have no similarities except the fact that one suspects that Gold knows more about the topos of salvation than he knows of Buddhist nirvana.

Gold belittles the insights of the Tibetan sage Milarepa (180). He begins to talk on and on about his daughter Etta, whom he jokingly says in this supposedly serious treatise, Milarepa never met. This shows that Gold has no clue about the yogic siddhis, which Hindus, Buddhists, and Jains know all seers of the stature of Milarepa to have. Milarepa's and the Buddhist tradition's emphasis on renunciation is also mocked by Gold: 'I am supposed to realize that my attachment to my daughter is deluding me and preventing me from renouncing my home and family and pursuing *nirvāṇa*. But from a conventional perspective, the actual perspective from which I view my own life, to see my daughter (or my son, or my wife, or my work, etc.) as a fetter would be to deny what I experience to be the meaning of my life. This is a stark example, and that makes for some of the humor in Milarepa's poem. Surely there must be some positive karmic benefit from caring for a daughter' (180).

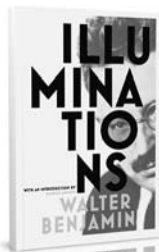
Instead of talking of Vasubandhu's ideas of karmic bonds or Milarepa's insights into karma, we now get to hear of what Gold thinks has karmic benefits! Because there is 'some positive karmic benefit from caring for' Etta, who likes playing basketball (205), Gold will harangue us about how great a parent he is, and how lucky all of them are to be born in the United States: 'As a parent I can take some of the credit, for having provided food and insisting on sleep. I also bought the basketball. I might like to take credit also for my daughter's genetic heritage ... having-been-born-in-the-right-place-at-the-right-time' (206).

But while Buddhists and Vasubandhu would

credit karma as part of Etta's actions, Gold concludes that in the final analysis, all these are possible due to America's scientific progress. What this reviewer finds in this book is the same old refrain of American exceptionalism. Only here, American exceptionalism is contrasted in a positive light to Gold's American non-experiential understanding of Vasubandhu's philosophy.

The depth of this book can be summarised by quoting Gold himself: 'All that we need is to know the rock we kick with our foot is empty space' (221). All that we need to know of this book is that it is bereft of coherence and meaning.

Subhasis Chattopadhyay



Illuminations

Walter Benjamin

Bodley Head, Penguin Random House, 20 Vauxhall Bridge Road, London, SW1V 2SA. UK. Website: <https://www.penguin.co.uk/>. 2015. 272 pp. £16.99. PB. ISBN 9781847923868.

The mysterious Monsieur Chouchani, as it were, fashioned the thinking of Emmanuel Levinas among others. The less mysterious, but for Hannah Arendt's intervention, Walter Benjamin now exerts an influence over us that is more pervasive but this reviewer finds that our understanding of Benjamin has been narrow in scope. We tend to slot him as an atheist whose Marxism is akin to Max Horkheimer's and Theodor Adorno's rabid anti-populist rants. The book under review, which is part of the 'Bloomsbury Revelations' series, includes Benjamin's essay 'The Storyteller'. Unless Benjamin is quoted at some length, his difference from other atheistic existentialists will not be clear:

The earliest symptom of a process whose end is the decline of storytelling is the rise of the novel at the beginning of modern times. ... The storyteller takes what he tells from experience—his own or that reported by others. And he in turn makes it the experience of those who are listening to his tale. The novelist has isolated himself. The birthplace of the novel is the solitary individual, who is no longer able to express himself by giving examples of his most important concerns, is himself uncounseled, and

cannot counsel others. To write a novel means to carry the incommensurable to extremes in the representation of human life. In the midst of life's fullness, and through the representation of this fullness, the novel gives evidence of the profound perplexity of the living. Even the first great book of the genre, *Don Quixote*, teaches how the spiritual greatness, the boldness, the helpfulness of one of the noblest of men, Don Quixote, are completely devoid of counsel and do not contain the slightest scintilla of wisdom. If now and then, in the course of the centuries, efforts have been made ... to implant instruction in the novel, these attempts have always amounted to a modification of the novel form (87).

Benjamin's implicit yearning for 'spiritual greatness' and 'wisdom' is precisely what according to Benjamin is missing from *Don Quixote*. Like Simone Weil and the popular Jacques Derrida of aporias and of eternal *différences*, Benjamin yearns for the spiritual within 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' (211–44). It is a different matter that this seminal and oft-quoted essay has influenced thinkers ranging from Marshall McLuhan to Jean Baudrillard. Baudrillard's contempt of popular culture as simulacra is informed by Benjamin's rejection of the popular; of the cultural perversity of the masses:

The growing proletarianization of modern man and the increasing formation of masses are two aspects of the same process. Fascism attempts to organize the newly created proletarian masses without affecting the property structure which the masses strive to eliminate. Fascism sees its salvation in giving these masses not their right, but instead a chance to express themselves. The masses have a right to change property relations; Fascism seeks to give them an expression while preserving property. The logical result of Fascism is the introduction of aesthetics into political life. The violation of the masses, whom Fascism, with its Führer cult, forces to their knees, has its counterpart in the violation of an apparatus which is pressed into the production of ritual values (234).

(Continued on page 582)

MANANA

**Exploring thought-currents from around the world.
Extracts from a thought-provoking book every month.**

Innate:

How the Wiring of Our Brains Shapes

Who We Are

Kevin J Mitchell

Princeton University Press, 41 William Street, Princeton, New Jersey 08540. 2018. xi + 293 pp. \$29.95. HB. ISBN 9780691184999.

On Human Nature

HOW WOULD YOU describe yourself? If you had to list some personality traits, say for a dating website or a job application, what words would you use? Do you consider yourself shy or outgoing? Are you cautious or reckless? Anxious or carefree? Are you creative, artistic, adventurous, stubborn, impulsive, sensitive, brave, mischievous, kind, imaginative, selfish, irresponsible, conscientious? People clearly differ in such traits and in many other aspects of their psychology—such as intelligence and sexual preference, for example. All of these things feed into making us *who we are*.

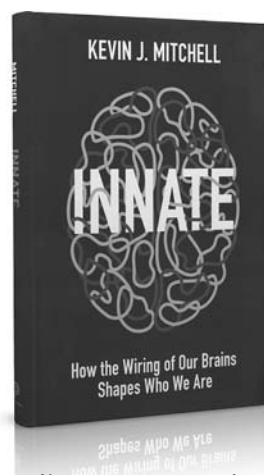
The question is, how do we get that way? This has been a subject of endless debate for literally thousands of years, with various prominent thinkers, from Aristotle and Plato to Pinker and Chomsky, lining up to argue for either innate differences between people or for everyone starting out with a blank slate and our psychology being shaped by experience alone. In the past century, the tradition of Freudian psychology popularized the idea that our psychological dispositions could be traced to formative childhood experiences. In many areas of modern academic sociology and psychology this belief is still widespread, though it has been extended to include cultural and environmental

factors more broadly as important determinants of our characters.

But these fields have been fighting a rearguard action in recent years, against an onslaught from genetics and neuroscience, which have provided strong evidence that such traits have at least some basis in our innate biology. To some, this is a controversial position, perhaps even a morally offensive one. But really it fits with our common experience that, at some level, people just are the way they are—that they're just made that way. Certainly, any parent with more than one child will know that they start out different from each other, in many important ways that are unrelated to parenting.

This notion of innate traits is often equated with the influences of genes—indeed, 'innate' and 'genetic' are often used interchangeably. This idea is captured in common phrases such as 'the apple doesn't fall far from the tree', or 'he didn't lick it off the stones'. These sayings reflect the widespread belief that many of our psychological traits are not determined solely by our upbringing but really are, to some extent at least, 'in our DNA'.

How that could be is the subject of this book. How could our individual natures be encoded in our genomes? What is the nature of that information and how is it expressed? That is, in a sense, just a different version of this question: How is human



nature, generally, encoded in the human genome? If there is a program for making a human being with typical human nature, then our individual natures may simply be variations on that theme. In the same way, the human genome contains a program for making a being about so tall, but individual humans are taller or shorter than that due to variation in the programs encoded in their respective genomes. We will see that the existence of such variation is not only plausible—it is inevitable.

Being Human

If we think about human nature generally, then we should ask, first, whether it even exists. Are there really typical characteristics that are inherent in each of us that make humans different from other animals? This question has exercised philosophers for millennia and continues to today, partly because it can be framed in many different ways. By human nature, do we mean expressed behaviors that are unique to humans and not seen in other animals? Do we mean ones that are completely universal across all members of the species? Or ones that are innate and instinctive and not dependent at all on maturation or experience?

But if instead we define human nature as a set of behavioral capacities or tendencies that are typical of our species, some of which may nevertheless be shared with other animals, and which may be expressed either innately or require maturation or experience to develop, then the list is long and much less contentious. Humans *tend* to walk upright, be active during the day, live in social groups, form relatively stable pair-bonds, rely on vision more than other senses, eat different kinds of food, and so on. A zoologist studying humans would say they are bipedal, diurnal, gregarious, monogamous, visual, and omnivorous—all of these traits are shared by some other species, but that overall profile characterizes humans.

And humans have *capacities* for highly dexterous movements, tool use, language, humor, problem solving, abstract thought, and so on. Many of those capacities are present to some degree in other animals, but they are vastly more developed in humans. The actual behaviors may only emerge with maturation and many depend to some extent on learning and experience, but the capacities themselves are inherent. Indeed, even our capacity to learn from experience is itself an innate trait. Though our intellect separates us from other animals—by enabling the development of language and culture, which shape all of our behaviors—our underlying nature is a product of evolution, the same as for any other species.

Simply put, humans have those species-general tendencies and capacities because they have human DNA. If we had chimp DNA or tiger DNA or aardvark DNA, we would behave like chimps or tigers or aardvarks. The essential nature of these different species is encoded in their genomes. Somehow, in the molecules of DNA in a fertilized egg from any of these species is a code or program of development that will produce an organism with its species-typical nature. Most importantly, that entails the specification of how the brain develops in such a way that wires in these behavioral tendencies and capacities. Human nature, thus defined, is encoded in our genomes and wired into our brains in just the same way.

This is not a metaphor. The different natures of these species arise from concrete differences in some physical properties of their brains. Differences in overall size, structural organization, connections between brain regions, layout of microcircuits, complement of cell types, neurochemistry, gene expression, and many other parameters all contribute in varied ways to the range of behavioral tendencies and capacities that characterize each species.



REPORTS

Commemoration of the 125th Anniversary of Swami Vivekananda's Addresses at the World's Parliament of Religions in Chicago, USA

The following centres held programmes mentioned against their names: **In India: Antpur:** A seminar on 19 May 2019 in which 200 people participated. **Asansol:** Four youth conferences at nearby places, namely Chittaranjan, Chelod, Jamuria, and Raniganj, in May in which 477 youths took part. **Jalpaiguri:** (i) A parents' convention at a public auditorium in **Jalpaiguri** on 4 May, which was attended by 430 people, and (ii) a devotees' convention in **Siliguri** on 5 May in which Srimat Swami Suhitanandaji Maharaj, Vice-President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, and a few others spoke; about 1,350 devotees took part in the convention. **Mangaluru:** Lecture programmes in 3 colleges in May, which were attended by 850 youths in all. **Rajkot:** A public meeting on 13 May which was presided over by Srimat Swami Shivamayanandaji Maharaj, Vice-President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, and attended by about 400 people. **Outside India: Malaysia:** A programme with speeches and music at a public hall in Kuala Lumpur on 1 May, which was attended by 300 devotees. **St Louis, USA:** A special programme on 19 May consisting of talks by a few scholars, an audio-visual presentation, and singing of bhajans. A commemorative volume was also released on the occasion. The programme was attended by nearly 250 people and was held at the Hindu Temple of St Louis.

News of Branch Centres

Srimat Swami Smarananandaji Maharaj,



Devotees' Convention at Siliguri

President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, installed new pictures of Holy Mother Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda in Sri Ramakrishna temple at **Ramakrishna Math, Bamunmura** on 7 May, the auspicious Akshaya Tritiya. The programme was attended by 130 monks and about 500 devotees.

Srimat Swami Gautamanandaji Maharaj, Vice-President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission and Adhyaksha, Ramakrishna Math, Chennai, reconsecrated the renovated Sri Ramakrishna temple at the **Ramakrishna Ashrama, Nettayam**, a sub-centre of **Ramakrishna Ashrama, Thiruvananthapuram** on 7 May. A procession, public meetings, and cultural programmes were held in this connection from 6 to 8 May.

Vivekananda College of **Ramakrishna Mission Vidyapith, Chennai** has earned the distinction of having its autonomous status extended by the UGC (University Grants Commission) for ten years, from 2019–20 to 2028–29. As per the UGC norms, only those institutions which have secured 3.51 or more grade points, out of 4, in their NAAC (National Assessment and Accreditation Council) assessment are eligible to get the extension for ten years. Vivekananda College had scored 3.56 grade points in its third cycle of NAAC assessment in 2017.

A third-year B.Com. student of the Vidyapith has secured the 8th rank in the all-India Intermediate Examination conducted by the

Institute of Cost Accountants of India. He was awarded a certificate and a silver medal at a function held in Kolkata on 15 May.

Four Sanskrit students of **RKMVERI** (Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda Educational and Research Institute, deemed university), **Belur**, won prizes in the national-level Bhagavadgita memorisation contest held in Sringeri by Dakshinamnaya Sri Sharada Peetham on 19 May. Each of them received a cash prize of rupees 21,000 and a certificate of merit.

The NCC unit of **Ramakrishna Vidyashala, Mysuru** received the Best Institution Award, Junior Division (Boys), for the year 2018–19 from the NCC Directorate, Karnataka and Goa. A rolling-trophy and a citation were handed over to the unit at a function held in Bengaluru on 3 February.

Nine students of the Vidyalaya of **Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Narendrapur, Kolkata** won the prestigious Kishore Vaigyanik Protsahan Yojana (KV PY) Fellowship 2018.

The Vidyalaya won the Best School Award in an inter-school mathematics contest held by Mayurakshi, a private company based in Kolkata. A trophy and a cash award of rupees 1.50 lakh were handed over to the school on 20 April. The school also stood first in the state-level mathematics fair conducted on 27 April by Bidhannagar Municipal School, Kolkata, in collaboration with the Calcutta Mathematical Society.

The following centres held summer camps for students. The programmes included chanting, bhajans, yogasanas, and values education classes: 1. **Aurangabad**: 1 to 9 May, 133 students participated; 2. **Bengaluru**: 14 to 28 April, 110 students participated; 3. **Chennai Math**: 1 to 31 May, 227 students participated; 4. **Chennai Mission Ashrama**: 5 to 26 May, 56 students participated; 5. **Hyderabad**: 8 to 20 April, 603 students participated; 22 April to 6 May, 1,410 students

participated; 8 to 22 May, 990 students participated; 6. **Indore**: 1 to 5 May, 120 students participated; 7. **Kadapa**: 3 to 12 May, 117 students participated; 8. **Kayamkulam**: 22 to 26 April, 38 students participated; 9. **Kochi**: 22 to 28 April, 51 students participated; 10. **Madurai**: 25 April to 14 May, 150 students participated; 11. **Mysuru**: 12 to 19 April, 170 students participated; 22 April to 22 May, 92 students participated; 12. **Nagpur**: 6 to 12 May, 120 students participated; 13. **Porbandar**: 1 to 26 May, 120 students participated; 14. **Rajkot**: 6 to 26 May (senior students), 245 students participated; 6 to 25 May (junior students), 134 students participated; 15. **Tirupati**: 5 to 19 May, 70 students participated.

Ramakrishna Mission, Aalo conducted an anti-tobacco and health awareness programme in a nearby village on 22 May, which was attended by 50 people.

Ramakrishna Math, Koyilandy held a medical camp on 21 May in which doctors checked 60 children from a fishermen colony and gave medicines.

Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Salem conducted discourses and bhajans at the Central Prison in Salem on 28 April, which were attended by about 500 inmates of the prison.

Ramakrishna Mission, Vijayawada, a sub-centre of Sitanagaram centre, in association with Madras Dyslexia Association, held a training programme from 6 to 11 May in which 62 teachers received training in imparting education to children affected by dyslexia—a disorder that involves difficulty in learning to read or interpret words, letters, and other symbols.

Ramakrishna Vedanta Centre, Lusaka, Zambia, held a blood donation camp on 1 May in which 42 people donated blood.

Values Education and Youth Programmes
Agartala centre held a state-level residential



Dyslexia Training Programme at Sitanagaram, Vijayawada



Blood Donation Camp at Lusaka, Zambia

youth camp from 26 to 28 April in which 241 youths participated.

Delhi centre conducted 24 values education workshops in 10 states and 2 union territories between 29 April and 25 May which were attended by a total of 1,655 teachers and 182 principals.

Rajkot Ashrama held values education programmes at five schools located in remote parts of Kutch district on 25, 26, and 27 April; 425 students attended the programmes.

Salem Ashrama conducted a values education programme at a college in Mecheri, Salem district, on 2 and 3 April, 180 students participated.

Relief

Economic Rehabilitation : Under self-employment programme, the following centres distributed necessary items to poor and needy people in their respective areas: (a) **Guwahati**: 11 *tant-sal*, weaving instruments, and 20 sewing machines on 17 March. (b) **Rahara**: 6 tricycles and 2 wheelchairs from 25 December to 16 March.

Fire Relief: (i) **Arunachal Pradesh**: In a fire incident at Deomali Township in Tirap district on 26 March, four houses were completely burned down. **Narottam Nagar** centre distributed 8 blankets, 7 shirts, 19 trousers, 12 sweat-shirts, and 7 belts among the affected families on 31 March. (ii) **West Bengal**: In response to a fire at a slum in Dakshineswar, Kolkata, on 16 March, **Baranagar Mission** centre distributed 34 saris and an equal number of plates, bowls,


tumblers, mosquito-nets, and bed covers among 34 affected families on 6 April. (iii) **Tamil Nadu**: In a fire incident in Mylapore, Chennai, 13 huts were destroyed on 18 May. **Chennai Math** distributed 40 lungis, 40 saris, 16 shirts, 40 trousers, 40 towels, some children's garments, 48 pots, 16 pans, 96 plates, 64 spoons, 64 tumblers, and 32 mats among 16 affected families on 22 May.

Cyclone Relief : A cyclonic storm hit Khulna district in Bangladesh on 9 April. In response to the calamity, **Bagerhat** centre distributed 1,000 kg rice, 100 saris and 100 lungis among 100 families on 16 April.

Fani, an extremely severe cyclonic storm, made its landfall in Puri on 3 May. The cyclone caused severe damage to the homes and public infrastructure in Odisha and also a few parts of West Bengal. Details of the relief work done by our centres so far are as follows: (a) **Odisha**: **Puri Mission** distributed 1,200 saris, 1,200 lungis, 1,200 towels, and 1,200 packets of biscuits among 1,200 families on 19 May. **Bhubaneswar, Puri Math** and **Puri Mission** centres have surveyed the afflicted areas and are in the process of distributing relief materials. Further reports are awaited. (b) **West Bengal**: **Manasadwip** centre distributed 85 asbestos sheets, 22 steel pipes, 16 concrete pillars, 12 bamboo poles, 8 tarpaulins, 7 corrugated tin sheets, 40 tiles, 1 bag of cement, and 5 bags of sand among 11 families on 28 May.

Distress Relief: The following centres

distributed various items, shown against their names, to needy people: **Aalo:** 102 blankets on 1 April and 528 shirts, 361 trousers, 229 jackets, and 361 sweaters on 5 and 12 May. **Bagda:** 3,520 shirts, 530 trousers, 1,000 tops, and 2,000 sweaters from 7 February to 29 March. **Baranagar Mission:** 10 saris, 100 bedsheets, 100 mosquito-nets, 10 plates, 10 bowls, 10 tumblers, 164 phials of hair oil, 164 packets of washing powder, 164 tubes of toothpaste, and 164 toothbrushes on 7 May. **Barisha:** 1,000 shirts, 300 tops, and 75 blankets from 16 February to 29 March. **Belgharia:** 2,407 shirts, 1,907 trousers, 200 tops, and 3,061 sweaters from 3 to 20 March. **Contai:** 1,300 shirts, 800 trousers, and 500 tops from 18 to 27 March. **Cooch Behar:** 3,000 shirts, 475 jackets, and 25 sweaters on 17 March. **Dehradun:** 222 jackets from 21 January to 18 March. **Jalpaiguri:** 10,007 shirts, 9,967 trousers, and 6,000 sweaters from 28 January to 29 March. **Katihar:** 958 shirts, 190 trousers, 151 jackets, 237 sweaters, and 609 sweatshirts from 28 February to 16 March. **Khetri:** 1,460 shirts, 638 T-shirts, 780 trousers, 14 blazers, 104 jackets, 2,381 sweaters, 185 sweatshirts, and 37 blankets from 20 February to 18 March. **Koyilandy:** 22 tarpaulins, 24 solar lamps, and 22 blankets on 18 May. **Mayavati:** 1,780 shirts, 1,876 trousers, and 7,071 sweaters from 9 December to 4 March. **Muzaffarpur:** 1,528 T-shirts, 1,495 trousers, and 2,611 sweaters from 27 May to 31 March. **Ponnampet:** 1,000 sweaters from 31 December to 31 March. **Purulia:** 535 shirts, 535 trousers, 2,400 jackets, and 300 blankets from 20 December to 25 February. **Rajarhat Bishnupur:** 8 shirts, 10 trousers, 22 saris, 9 raincoats, 9 aprons, 7 sweaters, 3 shawls, and a coat from 21 to 24 March. **RKMVERI, Belur:** 1,787 shirts, 842 trousers, 1,407 tops, 1,521 sweaters, 681 sweatshirts, 563 assorted ladies' garments, 68 blankets, and 222 school bags from 7 March 2018 to 11 March

2019. **Sikra-Kulingram:** 95 saris, 100 dhotis, 100 *uttariyas* or upper-body wrappers, 200 shirts, and 100 sweaters from 1 January to 26 February. **Swamiji's Ancestral House:** 1,720 shirts, 435 T-shirts, and 845 trousers on 29 March. **Vrindaban:** 450 kg rice, 450 kg flour, 112 kg dal, 112 kg cooking oil, 225 kg salt, 56 kg sugar, 45 kg tea leaves, 56 kg milk powder, and 225 bars of washing soap on 7 May. 

(Continued from page 576)

This reviewer, without trying to commit either any intentional or affective fallacies, agrees with Benjamin and therefore, with Arendt's powerful 'Introduction' (7–58) to this volume of Benjamin's essays. Arendt says of Benjamin that the 'trouble with everything Benjamin wrote was that it always turned out to be sui generis' (9), and this reviewer has to add that the trouble with Benjamin will be that everything he wrote will turn out to be prescient and thus dangerous. The danger posed by *Illuminations* is the danger that marks the thoughts of Azar Nafisi. In a certain sense, knowing Chouchani, Benjamin, Arendt, and Nafisi is unsettling and dangerous in these times when the barbarian has arrived at academia, dumbing down everything for the consumption of the masses.

After all, we live in an era of binge viewing and social media acceptance/isolation. The beast that began crouching towards Bethlehem is born, and we ignore Benjamin at our peril. Eichmanns and Goebbels have again begun providing 'salvation ... [to the] masses ... [and] a chance to express themselves' by 'the introduction of aesthetics into political life'. We only have to see the vast number of literary festivals and seminars globally to know how the erstwhile opaque aesthetic object has become conflated with mass hysterics and incomprehensible comprehension.

Illuminations is not for the faint-hearted; it is not the Modernist manifesto it is made out to be. It is a theological call to action by a man who loved quotations (9). *Illuminations*, ironically, is one of the greatest repositories of quotable quotes.

Subhasis Chattopadhyay



A Comprehensive Annual Report of RELIEF & REHABILITATION

(From 1st April 2018 to 31st March 2019)

The Ramakrishna Math & Ramakrishna Mission have been rendering relief and rehabilitation services to the victims of natural and manmade disasters for more than a century. This comprehensive annual report covers such services rendered by the Math and Mission in the financial year 2018-19. The total expenditure incurred for the relief activities covering including flood relief, fire relief, cyclone relief, summer relief, Gangasagar relief, Winter relief, Economic Rehabilitation relief and Distress relief during this period was nearly **Rs. 46.09 crore (Indian Rupees 460 million)**.

FLOOD RELIEF: India: Assam, Karnataka, Kerala, Manipur, Tripura, Kailashahar, Uttar Pradesh: West Bengal, Fiji, Sri Lanka; **FIRE RELIEF:** Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Meghalaya, Odisha, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, Darjeeling, Kankurgachhi, Saradapitha; **CYCLONE RELIEF:** Andhra Pradesh, Visakhapatnam, Odisha, Similarly, Bhubaneswar Tamil Nadu: Chennai Math, Chennai Mission Ashrama, Chennai Students' Home, Kanchipuram and Madurai, West Bengal, Ramharipur; **SUMMER RELIEF:** Puri Mission, Chennai Mission Ashrama, Hyderabad; **GANGASAGAR MELA RELIEF:** West Bengal-Seva Pratishthan; **WINTER RELIEF; ECONOMIC REHABILITATION:** Antpur, Chandipur, Chengalpattu, Guwahati, Khetri, Rahara, Taki; Bangladesh; Comilla; Zambia; Lusaka; **REHABILITATION:** Gujarat: Vadodara, Kerala: Kochi Tamil Nadu: Chennai Math, Chennai Students' Home and Kanchipuram West Bengal: Mekhliganj, Contai **DISTRESS RELIEF:** .

We express our sincere gratitude to all the volunteers and devotees for their painstaking hard work in these relief activities. We also extend our cordial thanks to all the donors, benevolent organizations, government officials and others for their participation and cooperation in this noble endeavour.

May the blessings of the Lord shower upon all!

Yours sincerely,

Swamī Suviraṇanda

Date: 31 March 2019
Belur Math

Swami Suvirananda
General Secretary

A Note for Communication and For Sending Donations to Relief Section

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Ramakrishna Mission (**Relief Section**),

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If you want to send your donations towards this corpus fund, **kindly mention in your covering letter the following: 'I/We are donating the amount as a part of 'Permanent Fund for Provident Relief Fund' and the income from it may be used for the said purpose'.**

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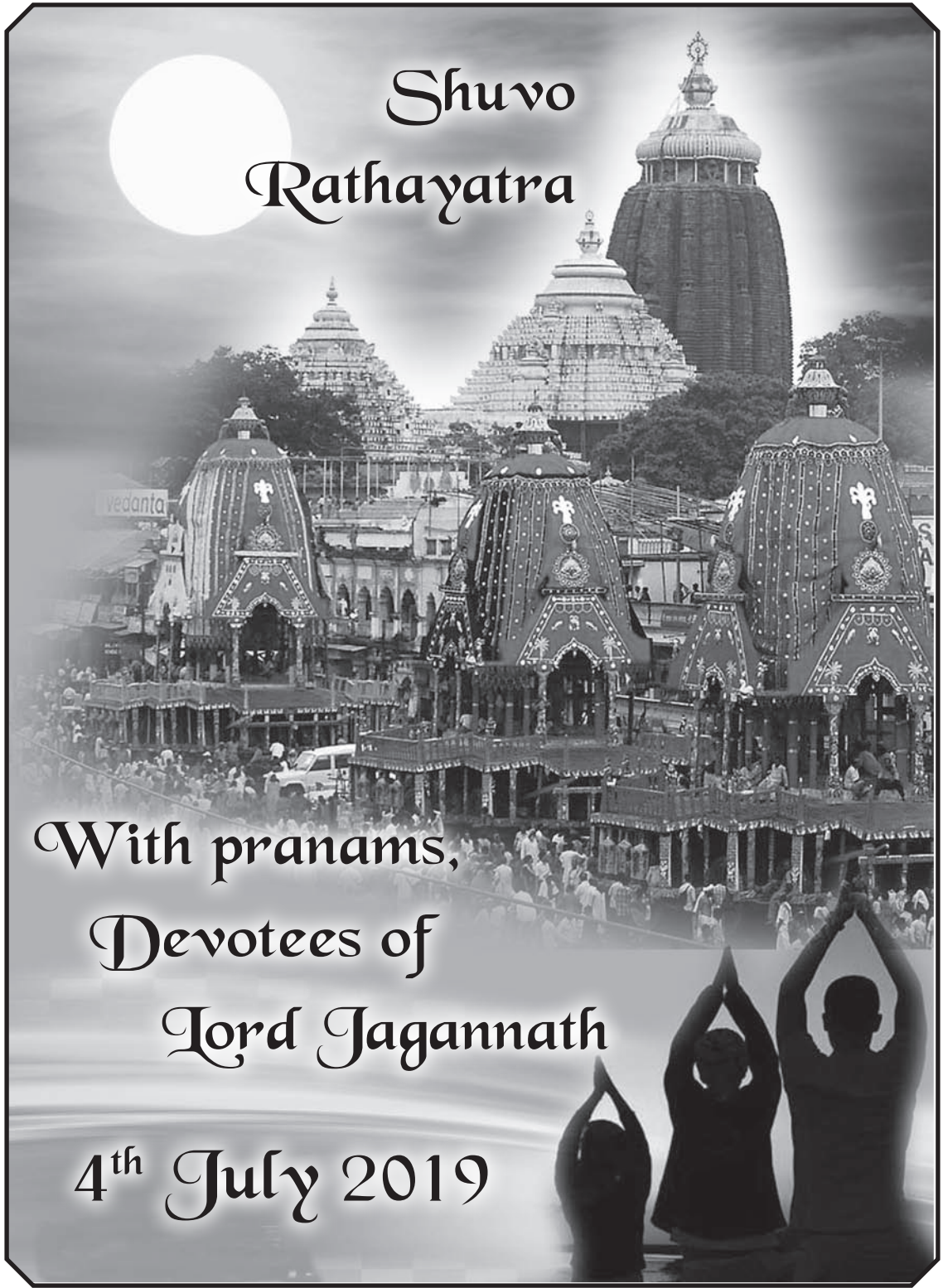
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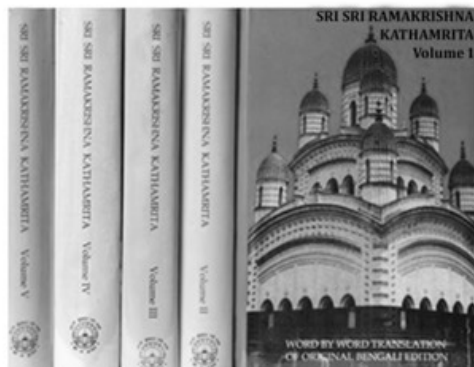




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We want to lead mankind to the place where there is neither the Vedas, nor the Bible, nor the Koran; yet this has to be done by harmonising the Vedas, the Bible and the Koran.

Mankind ought to be taught that religions are but the varied expressions of THE RELIGION, which is Oneness, so that each may choose the path that suits him best.

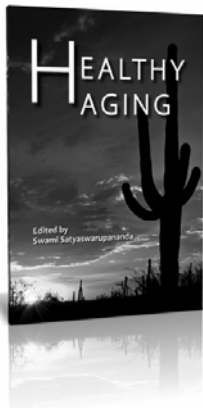


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Offering to Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna: An Appeal

Dear Devotees & Friends,

Ramakrishna Math & Mission, Belur Math declared open a Math centre at Uttarkashi, an ancient holy town in the Garhwal Himalayas on 20th Oct 2017. There was already a small dwelling house, named as Ramakrishna Kutir since 1963, where sadhus of our Order used to stay for intense Tapasya in the traditional monastic way, begging food from outside and living a simple austere life. Swami Turiyananda, a direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna spent a year or so in Uttarkashi during his wondering days. Impressed by the Swami's overwhelming personality and knowing him to be a disciple of Sri Ramakrishna the Raja of Tehri donated a piece of land to him at Uttarkashi and the then Mahant of Kailas Ashrama built a small hut for him. That was the sowing of the seed of future Ramakrishna Math in Uttarkashi.

In view of expanding Swami Vivekananda's ideal of service and spirituality among the masses we plan to purchase some land measuring at least one acre in Harsil Valley, 75 Kms. off Uttarkashi and 25 kms. near Gangotri. Along with retreat centres for sadhus and devotees, some welfare activities for the benefit of the poor and underprivileged will be taken up after acquiring and developing the land.

A sum of **Rs. 2 crores** is estimated to set up and develop the additional unit of the Uttarkashi Math. We request our friends and devotees, trusts and corporate bodies to contribute liberally to complete this project of welfare and spirituality at the earliest.

Donations can be made by NEFT/RTTGS to the ***Ramakrishna Math, Uttarkashi, Union Bank of India, Uttarkashi Branch; IFSC: UBIN0560189, A/c No. 601802010006696.***

Kindly mention the purpose- ***"Donation for purchase of land and development of the Math centre"***, the PAN and full address by email to uttarkashi@rkmm.org or SMS to **9447051231**.

May Sri Ramakrishna, Ma Sarada, Swami Vivekananda bless you all.

Date: 1 June 2019

Yours in the Lord,
Swami Amaleshananda
Adhyaksha



PILGRIM'S GUIDE TO THE HOLY TRIO IN KOLKATA



Sri Ramakrishna Visits Ratha-yatra Balaram's House

It was the day of the Car Festival on July 14, 1885. Having spent the night at Balaram's house, Sri Ramakrishna was dancing and chanting the name of God in the early morning. M. and other devotees entered and saluted the Master at about half past six. M. was going to bathe in the Ganges, when suddenly violent earthquake tremors were felt. At once he returned to Sri Ramakrishna's room where the Master stood in the drawing room, surrounded by frightened devotees. Thakur said, 'Such is the fate of the house under whose roof one lives; and still people are so egotistic.' Looking at the younger Naren, he said: 'A mere vision of God is by no means everything. You have to bring Him into your room. You have to talk to Him.' It was ten o'clock and Thakur was still talking with the devotees. A little later Narendranath arrived followed by Golap Ma. Thakur went to the inner apartment for noon meal. After his midday meal, he sat in the drawing-room with the devotees, speaking with Narendranath, the younger Naren and other devotees. When asked if there was free will, he replied, 'Try to find out who this "I" is. As long as the Upadhi exists, "I am a scholar,



Chariot pulled by Thakur


jnani, wealthy, honorable, etc, there is ignorance." "I am the machine and You are the Operator" is Knowledge. In the state of Knowledge all upadhis are destroyed.' Naren then sang, 'Oh when will dawn the blessed day when Love will waken in my heart as I repeat Lord Hari's name.' Vaishnavacharan then sang,



Old picture of Balaram Mandir


'Tongue always repeat the name of Mother Durga. Who but Durga's name will save you in danger?' Hearing the last line, Thakur stood up and went into Samadhi, supported by the younger Naren. After a long time he came down from Samadhi, chanting the holy name of God.' It was afternoon. In the mean time the small car of Jagannath, decorated with flowers, flags, and bunting, had been brought to the inner verandah. The images of Jagannath, Subhadra, and Balarama, were adorned with sandal paste, flower garlands, robes and jewelry. Sri Ramakrishna left the room where the professional musicians were singing and came to the verandah, accompanied by the devotees. He stood in front of the car and pulled it by the rope. He began to sing and dance with the devotees in front of the car. The Master sang: 'Behold, the two brothers have come, who weep while chanting Hari's name' followed by 'See how all Nadia is shaking under the waves of Gauranga's love! The music and dancing went on in the verandah as the car was pulled to and fro. A large crowd entered the house on hearing the loud music and the beating of the drums. Sri Ramakrishna was completely intoxicated with divine love. The devotees felt its contagion and danced with the Master in an ecstasy of love.

In loving memory of Dr. Rina Bhar —Dr. Gopal Chandra Bhar

The best guide in life is strength. In religion, as in all other matters, discard everything that weakens you, have nothing to do with it.

—Swami Vivekananda



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